

International and Cultural Psychology

Series Editor: Anthony J. Marsella, Ph.D. · Grant J. Rich

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Global Perspectives on Adolescents and Their Families

International and Cultural Psychology

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Explores problems and challenges to mental health, psychosocial wellbeing, human growth and development, and human welfare that are emerging from our contemporary global context. It advances in psychological knowledge regarding the nature and consequences of the many social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental events and forces that affect individuals and communities throughout the world. The series covers areas like therapy, assessment, organizational psychology, community psychology, gender, child development, and specific disorders. In addition, it addresses major global challenges such as poverty, peace, urbanization, modernization, refugees, and migration. The series acknowledges the multidisciplinary, multisectoral, and multicultural nature of the global context of our lives, and publishes books that reflect this reality.

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Editors

Global Perspectives on Adolescents and Their Families

 Springer

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Foreword

Globally, families are both agents for change and for resistance to change. Families, of course, can have a myriad of structures and even the word family can mean different things to people in different regions and cultures. For example, in most Western countries, families traditionally work hard to be economic or social units. In contrast, in other countries (e.g., in India or China), the family traditionally has also been a cultural and/or religious unit.

There are important observations about how families may differ based on centrality of extended family, authority based on generation or gender, significance of marriage and parenthood, as well as obligations and privileges based on kinship. However, around the world, contemporary families similarly must socialize the next generation for change that is more rapid than at any other period and in a milieu of competing and rapidly shifting mores and norms that is greater than previously known.

While families have always struggled with how best to meet the needs of their members for economic challenges, families all over the world have been or are facing transitions as they have moved/or are moving from units of economic production to units of economic consumption. Education as a preparation for adulthood as well as the attraction of salaried work pull family members toward urbanization and to scatter away from their family of origin. These shifts have altered intergenerational and gender roles within families. Family scientists believe that these forces have and will continue to intensify across the twenty-first century.

Families around the world continue to transform due to external forces coming from their own societies and beyond. Changing employment and economic opportunities have increased dislocations of some family members from historic expectations. Such contextual changes are challenging some traditional ways of 'being family.' Exposure to new diseases, changes in nutritional and activity levels simultaneous to increased longevity also have led to changes in intergenerational expectations. And, even as modern technologies have freed some parts of family life, in other ways technology and education have also brought new challenges to how gender and generations represented in families. Similarly, environmental and global

climate change is highly likely to complicate how families protect their members and accomplish their livelihoods.

Even as families use internal forces to attempt to pass on the values and benefits of cultural understanding and the advantages that accrue for those who follow tradition around how to solve life challenges in this place and time, societal and other external forces compete to influence families. Families must address both these sets of forces. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic threatened everyone everywhere. The realities of pandemic drove home the realization for many that if there is disease anywhere, it can travel anywhere and wreak havoc. In a global context, families encounter influences from near or far away, whether such factors are economic, technology, social media and popular culture, commerce, scientific advances, etc. Some changes are large and obvious (e.g., economic meltdown of 2008) and have obvious influences on families. Others are small and innocuous, but even small shifts (e.g., hand washing, access to social media, or electronic commerce) can have major consequences for families – both salutary and disruptive.

Often a book such as this one is read with an eye to superficial differences in how families protect, preserve, and socialize each other. I hope that readers will give a more careful reading of this book and thereby increase their awareness of the amazing similarities to demands on contemporary families everywhere in the contextual changes and cultural variations. Many of the resolutions of families to these demands are similar despite different histories, cultures, national politics, and geographic distance from each other. Meanwhile, cultural and contextual characteristics underscore the importance of understanding and meeting the unique needs of adolescents and their families facing global economic and public health crises and political conflicts. As with scientific advancements, recent technologies, and means of communication, disease, economic realities, and popular culture, such forces can lead to good or ill and render national borders less relevant.

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Introduction

Adolescence is a period of rapid development and multiple transitions. In Western societies, adolescence is recognized as a distinct period marked by biological growth and development and a unique period in which the individual is preparing for adult occupational and social roles. Yet across cultures, adolescence is viewed and experienced in diverse ways – and may or may not even be recognized as a distinct period (Crockett, 1997). Anchored in the human ecological framework, this edited volume examines the period of adolescence across multiple cultural settings and against the backdrop of a range of contemporary contexts (e.g., rural vs. urban, political unrest/war, rapid globalization). The volume situates the adolescent within the family as the prime socializing agent and highlights how resilience, family processes, and transitions to adulthood intersect with the ecocultural context. The book aims to expand current research on adolescents, family science, and culture by taking an international perspective, by exploring the family-adolescent relationship as dynamic, and by grounding the various aspects of adolescent development and their relationships with their families in cultural and situational contexts.

The Current Volume

This volume brings together leading global scholars to discuss how adolescents, within the context of the family, navigate the challenges, opportunities, and various aspects of the developmental landscape around the world. Families matter in the lives of adolescents – typically instrumental in fulfilling basic needs such as food, shelter, and safety; to meeting socialization needs and vocational or educational development. Families themselves are connected to and embedded within sociopolitical, economic, and cultural contexts. Yet, existing research does not usually consider (simultaneously) the cultural and global perspective, the roles of families, the impact of contemporary issues, and trends in adolescent development. The current volume also addresses contemporary sociopolitical circumstances that impact adolescence and their families today, including shifting norms (e.g., as they relate to

LGBTQ+ youth), globalization, mobility, and the accelerating rate of access to digital technology and electronically mediated communication (e.g., mobile technology, social media). Contributions to this book are organized in four parts.

Part I Chapters in this first section tackle the issue of adolescent development and family relationships in the context of rapidly changing settings. Increasing mobility, globalization, and accelerating advancements in information technology are having important implications for the contexts in which adolescents are situated. In fact, the “developmental context” today may extend well beyond one’s proverbial backyard, with youth engaging directly in what Bronfenbrenner (1979) called the “microsystem,” but simultaneously and directly engaging in both digital contexts and microsystems that may be distances away. In Chap. 1, Bahira Trask discusses globalization and key demographic trends (e.g., dropping fertility rates, increasing diversity in family compositions, shifts in age stratification) that have important implications for adolescent development. She argues that such shifts are impacting families and adolescents, but that their effects vary across socioeconomic status. Given the potential negative stresses that such rapid changes are introducing, this chapter highlights the heightened importance of supporting adolescents and engaging them in positive ways as active agents in their own development.

In Chap. 2, Xiaoran Sun focuses on the increasingly ubiquitous role that digital technology is playing in the lives of adolescents today and how it both supports and hinders various dimensions of autonomy development. Finally, in Chap. 3, Mira Ofreño, Brenda Alegre, Tesa de Vela, and Tristan Gamalinda write about the experiences of LGBTQ+ adolescents in the contexts of family life, the communities in which they reside, and the broader global society that youth are now able to access in the current information landscape. Focusing on the experiences of youth in the Philippines, the chapter tackles the complex interplay between predominant societal norms and beliefs around LGBTQ+ individuals which may reject an important aspect of the developing adolescent’s identity.

Part II Research on adolescents’ active roles as citizens and their lives and their families’ experiences in contexts of regional violence and political unrest is wanting. Contributions in Part II explore adolescents as participants in civic matters and the challenges that adolescents and families face, either as refugees or facing the loss of missing loved ones as a result of political upheavals. In Chap. 4, Catherine Solheim, Pamela Dysart, and Nusroon Fatiha analyze the context that influences the development of adolescent refugees. Using a systemic and ecological approach, the authors discuss the multiplicity of challenges they face, including gaps in food, clothing, and housing needs, as well as pressing mental health needs which require specialized services and trained staff that are not always available. Adolescents also face challenges of integration, victimization, and discrimination due to their racial, ethnic, and cultural characteristics that, as they intersect, place them in even more vulnerable situations.

Despite the challenges that many youths face, adolescents and their families have shown remarkable resilience even in the most dire of circumstances. Based on a

case study, Chap. 5 addresses the experiences and implications of the disappearance of loved ones in a Mexican family, which represents the experiences of several families in Latin American countries, where drug trafficking and organized crime have undermined trust and a sense of normative regulation. From a socio-ecological and phenomenological perspective, Rosario Esteinou and Mariel A. Reyes reconstruct, through the mother/wife's narrative, the experiences of the disappearance of two of her children since 2012, the effects it has had on each member, and the family dynamics resulting from the experience. The authors pay special attention to the experience of ambiguous loss, the coping strategies used by each family member, their meaning-making and the "psychological family" as resilience mechanisms, and their challenges. In Chap. 6, Kieu Anh Do, Gilbert R. Parra, Surin Kim, Shruti Pillai, Evan Choi, and Maria Rosario T. de Guzman discuss the state of youth civic engagement around the world. They explore the various ways by which civic engagement is depicted in the literature and argue for its importance in the normative development of youth. The authors review the shifts in levels of engagement and emphases on youth civic engagement around the world, as well as new ways by which youths are now becoming involved in bigger causes, including through digital means.

Part III Chapters in Part III call attention to some of the individual mental health and well-being challenges that adolescents face throughout the world. By focusing on crisis and trauma, substance use, suicide, family violence and poverty, the authors explore contexts that exacerbate an already complex developmental phase that tends to be associated with elevated risks for compromising behaviors and challenges in well-being. Each chapter highlights the universality of struggles and at the same time, the unique dimensions of the immediate context, family roles, norms, and various aspects of the social settings. In Chap. 7, Bruna Larissa Seibel, Tyele Goulart Peres, Raysa Schmitz Serafim, and Cody Stonewall Hollist discuss the impact of stress, crisis, and trauma on Brazilian adolescents and their families. The variability of available services from community to community in Brazil often means support for these challenges goes back to families, friends, and communities. In Chap. 8, W. Alex Mason discusses the difficulty of determining the scope of global adolescent substance use because many low- and middle-income countries do not track those rates. He outlines preventative programs that build protective factors like attentive parenting and reductions in maltreatment to decrease substance use. Programs need greater global empirical evaluation as there are many parts of the world that do not have culturally validated prevention or intervention programs. In Chap. 9, Sibö Zhao and Jie Zhang describe how improvements in mental health, economic growth, and improving family relationships have decreased suicide among adolescents in China. Contemporary parenting in China, possibly due to the one-child policy, is more authoritative and emotionally supportive than it was historically. Suicidality among Chinese adolescents is significantly down from 2007 to 2015.

In Chap. 10, Spencer L. James and Jane Rose M. Njue point out that a majority of the research about family violence has been conducted in wealthy countries.

They report on data from 21 countries in 7 world regions and outline the impact this violence has on economies, families, and adolescent development. They specifically point out characteristics by age, sex, rural versus urban, household income, and other important factors. Anis B. Brik in Chap. 11 describes the prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress among Qatari parents of adolescents. This chapter is also taking in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Anis B. Brik also describes factors that impact parental mental health and the needed psychosocial support for families in high-stress situations.

Part IV Chapters in this section focus on aspects of adolescent development that are typically considered as normative dimensions of the transition to adulthood. In Chap. 12, Sarah Taylor, Natasza Kosakowska-Berezecka, Maria Rosario T. de Guzman, Yan Ruth Xia, Irene Padasas, and Jan Eстераich examine romantic relationships, dating violence and sexism from a cross-cultural perspective. Their research contrasts views regarding romantic relationships and dating violence among rural versus urban, and Polish versus US adolescents. In Chap. 13, Yunqi Wang, Rosario Esteinou, and Yan Ruth Xia review and compare studies focusing on adolescent-parent communications, including autonomy development among youth in China, Latin American and the Caribbean, and the United States. This chapter includes an extensive review of the literature, culling themes from scholarly works published in Chinese, Spanish, and English around the world. In Chap. 14, Lucy Kathuri-Ogola and Joan Kabaria-Muriithi write about social changes and the challenges that Kenyan families face in guiding their adolescents in transition into young adulthood in the today's Kenyan society. Finally, in Chap. 15, Mona Abo-Zena and Huda Akef shed light on outcomes and processes of religion and spirituality influences on adolescent development within the family by drawing from global representations of experiences of adolescents and families.

Emergent Themes

Contributions to this volume highlight the complex interplay of the various levels of context (e.g., micro, macro), individual level experiences and factors, and contemporary trends and issues in the relationships between family and adolescents, and consequently, adolescent development. Several themes emerged from the contributions.

Theme 1: Developmental tasks of adolescence continue amidst social, generational, and demographic change.

Contributions to this volume suggest that the developmental tasks of adolescence continue across a range of settings and amidst significant shifts in the social and demographic landscapes. Nonetheless, development does not occur in a vacuum and almost every contribution highlighted how the processes of adolescence continue (e.g., identity development, autonomy exploration), though embedded in both

proximal (e.g., family) and broader contexts that evolve. In Chap. 12, Taylor and colleagues illustrate country and rurality differences in adolescents' notions about romantic relationships and domestic violence, positing that differences and patterns may reflect both deeply embedded notions regarding gender roles, as well as national dialogues and debates occurring in Poland and the United States at the time of data collection. In most cases, however, shifts occur amidst static aspects of the context. In Chap. 3, Ofreneo and colleagues highlight how technology and access to media provide access to supportive communities for LGBTQ+ adolescents beyond their own national borders – providing a new form of support that previous generations lacked. And whereas generational shifts in understanding and acceptance of diverse sexualities are occurring in the Philippines, societal notions that are anti-LGBTQ+ deeply rooted in religious and other traditions persist, possibly contributing to stagnation in the passage of laws that protect the LGBTQ+ community.

Several other chapters further illustrate how the tasks of adolescence continue. In Chap. 2, Sun discusses and describes the ubiquity of digital technology in almost every aspect of adolescents' lives, and how the task of autonomy development continues amidst these shifts. In Chap. 6, Do and colleagues tackle the issue of civic engagement in youth – a critical dimension of adolescent development that continues, though levels of engagement appear to be impacted by both immediate (e.g., school setting) and broader contexts (e.g., socio-political climate) that evolve. In Chap. 15, Abo-Zena and Akef highlight an oft invisible aspect of development – religiosity and spirituality, which in fact continues throughout the lifespan but may be especially salient during the adolescent period.

As the developmental tasks of adolescence persist despite shifts in the caregiving landscape, so do the challenges. Research from the last few decades suggests elevated risks for various negative outcomes during the adolescent period. In Chap. 14, Kathuri-Ogola and Kabaria-Muriithi point out the increased rates of teenage pregnancy, substance use, and delinquency among Kenyan adolescents as they and their parents are overwhelmed and confused by the complexity of identity formation and parenting role in modern Kenya. In Chap. 8, Mason discusses substance use risk among adolescents around the world and highlights the continued importance of family and other protective factors. Shifting policies and contexts can both mitigate and exacerbate risk, but a growing understanding of substance use issues is also heralding in promising interventions across the globe. Seibel and colleagues (Chap. 7) discuss how various stresses impact youth and families in Brazil, as well as the role of public services to help mitigate their impact. Finally, in Chap. 9, Zhao and Zhang tackle the problem of suicide and suicide ideation – illustrating how shifts in economic and political contexts in China appear to impact families and social connections, and ultimately, adolescent well-being, mental health, and suicide risk.

Theme 2: Shifts occurring in the human socioecological context

Shifts in various aspects of the human socioecological context repeatedly emerged as important factors on adolescent development across the chapters. Globalization and increased mobility, digital technology advancement, instability and uncertainty, and other trends are introducing both challenges and new forms of

resources that impact families and youth. Globalization creates both opportunities and challenges for youth and families around the world, as noted by Trask (Chap. 1) who indicated divergence across income levels of the country, social economic status, geographical location, and gender. Youth and young people, especially females in low-income countries, as well as in low SES families within the high-income countries, are more likely to face unemployment and thus suffer from delayed starting families and financial disability. We see adolescent girls in Afghanistan and Sri Lanka lose their opportunities of continuing education when they are arranged by the family to marry to protect them from being raped and kidnapped as terrorists arise in the regions and globally as revealed by Kathuri-Ogola and Kabaria-Muriithi in Chap. 14. They also show through their analysis that facing harsh economies, strong families are essential in stabilizing Kenyan youth transition into early adulthood.

For far too many families and youth around the country, one shift in the socio-ecological context involves societal and economic instability and uncertainty resulting from wars, political conflict, human and drug trafficking, and other forms of collective violence that forcefully displace a vast number of families and disrupt and destroy human lives. In Chap. 4, Solheim and colleagues discuss how adolescents migrate with their families as refugees, facing a lengthy process that involves moving from refugee camps to host countries. Upon arrival, one of the big challenges for adolescents is to adjust to the social and cultural norms in new communities. Refugee families and helping services identify mental health as a top need besides the basic life necessities. In Chap. 5, Esteinou and Reyes examine adolescents and families that suffer from trauma caused by losing family members to the organized crimes in Latin American countries and the impact of disappearance of family members on adolescents and family functioning.

While globalization and migration stretch and connect the human ecological context, specifically economic, political, and social relationships in time and space (Steger, 2023); digital technology advancement seems to result in one of the major shifts by creating a virtual environment in which adolescents and families are organizing their lives. Sometimes but not always, these new virtual contexts are parallel to and integrated into the physical environment. Do and colleagues (Chap. 6) highlight digital activism as a new form of civic engagement for young generations who are technology savvy. Sun's systemic review (Chap. 2) of research on technology shows how technology promotes or hinders connectedness and ultimately, adolescents' autonomy development. "Technoference" in Chap. 2 and "self-socialization" in Chap. 14 are the new terms coined to describe the phenomena that family communications and adolescent development are digitized or mediated by applications of technology, for example, through social media and the internet. Sometimes, despite the three contemporary shifts described here, certain aspects of the ecological context remain static. In Chap. 3, Ofreneo and colleagues suggest that family rejection and social stigma continue to be the biggest challenge that LGBTQ+ adolescents face, with some norms and deeply rooted beliefs among many segments in Filipino society remaining constant at the same time as shifting norms among others in the same society but also in many other parts of the world.

Theme 3: The varied impacts of shifting contexts on development and well-being

Homeostasis, the tendency of systems to remain the same, resists change in families as well as in societies. In families, homeostasis looks like members pushing against those trying to change the system. In societies it looks the same. Change is going to be met with individuals who look with longing at the past and glorify days gone by. People who say “things were so much better when...” and the inverse, those who want to vilify the past and portray all change as good will continue to exist.

In the mid-1700s, the production of goods changed from being handmade to being made by machine. This inflection point was followed by significant growth in the standard of living. Scientific and technological developments led to decreases in infant mortality, increases in life expectancy, and greater household incomes. The development of those machines has also led to increases in pollution and economic disparity both between households as well as between nations. Some argue that life after the Industrial Revolution is significantly better with improvements in health and well-being. Yet, others argue that the Industrial Revolution has led to some of the greatest challenges our world has seen like global warming. The reality is that both are true. Change brings opportunity and growth, but it also brings challenges. The same can be said of adolescents growing up in contemporary families.

Rapid globalization, as outlined by Sun in Chap. 2, has meant change to families throughout the world but that change has not impacted families equally. Families in high- and low-income countries are impacted but are impacted differently. As we learned during the global COVID-19 pandemic, a problem in one part of the world can quickly spread to other regions. We also learned that solutions developed in one place can be shared more quickly than in times past. Communication and mobility in contemporary families influence not just the relationship between two adolescents but also many important processes in today’s global context. As pointed out by Solheim and colleagues in Chap. 4, there were more than 89 million forcibly displaced persons globally in 2021. That number has steadily increased for the past 20 years. How has communication and mobility played a part in that change? In Chap. 5, Esteinou and Reyes talk more explicitly about missing persons due to violence in regions with conflict and unrest. Social media and mobility can have a direct impact on the conflict and it can equally impact outcomes. Do developments in technology and mobility accelerate the capabilities in kinetic conflict and then in turn help people to escape the dangerous situation that they helped to create?

The uneven impacts of change and contemporary trends are also reflected in Chap. 10. James and Njue provide a compelling analysis of family violence across 12 countries and noted important differences in prevalence across various demographic factors (e.g., age, socioeconomic status) and regions. In Chap. 11, Brik provides another contemporary example, showing how a very dramatic shift in the context, that is, lockdown during COVID-19, appear to variably impact families of different constellations. Finally, in Chap. 13, Wang and colleagues discuss important differences around norms and expectations around autonomy. Consequently,

the various shifts occurring today that impact autonomy (e.g., globalization, mobility, digital communication) vary across societies.

So many of the changes in the environment of contemporary families are only positive or negative depending on how they are used. For families experiencing challenges, how can technological advances and other changes in society be used to improve adolescent development and not impede that development? Efforts to vilify technology or globalization delays efforts to figure out how to use these advances in positive ways and avoid their negative impacts.

Conclusions, Gaps, and Future Directions

The current volume sheds light on both within- and cross-cultural experiences of adolescents and the role of contemporary families in this process from the human socioecological framework. Regardless of the changing contexts brought about by globalization, political and economic instability, and technological advancement, the tasks of adolescence continues and families continue to play an important role, at least in the contexts and areas investigated by contributors to this volume. Families in all their forms and constellations, across income levels and countries represented in the current volume, continue to exert great impact, contrary to some beliefs that families are not as important today as they were in the past. Contributions to this volume emphasize this point.

The importance of families, vis-à-vis the challenges and opportunities in adolescence, may necessitate continued support, particularly in some of the most difficult circumstances represented in this volume. In many contexts, support may take the form of policies by nations' governments to support all families, particularly those with limited resources through financial assistance. Support may take the form of family life education (FLE) programs. In others, supporting families may mean considering various aspects of the context to provide a healthy and supportive ecology for development (e.g., sustainable community development, measures to make societies inclusive and diverse). Programs that help families in various ways and acknowledge families in all their configurations can benefit from knowledge and human development and healthy relationship and skills, recognizing their own strengths and utilizing external resources so that the families have resources may prove empowering.

As contributors to this volume explored different experiences in different parts of the world, they provided their own cultural lenses to the discourse surrounding adolescent development. The value of these differing perspectives highlighted our need as a field to take a closer look at the global utility of our models, theories, and even methodologies. Decolonizing our approach to thinking and learning about adolescents by seeking out perspectives from underrepresented voices can broaden the scope of our understanding of this complex developmental period. Several important questions to help us explore new perspectives emerge from the current contributions. Whereas we noted several commonalities and themes across the

chapters and highlighted the consistent developmental tasks that are noted through the decades of research, the authors also conveyed a need to make significant shifts in the conceptualization of ecological contexts. For example, in the very first chapter Trask points out an emerging shift away from geographically bound thinking toward global mindsets that are largely brought on by the ease of sharing information and travel enabled by technology. Evident from the chapters is that while there are some ubiquitous characteristics of adolescent development like identity formation and puberty, current theories and methods do not go far enough to explore the ways these characteristics might operationalize differently in various cultures and regions. Are we myopically applying current theories to explain adolescent development and families in ways that marginalize experiences that really just need to be more accurately articulated? We observe that some contributors question the conceptualization of research on adolescents growing experiences in different socioecological and cultural contexts. Our contributors noted that many researchers ground their studies in other work done in Western contexts even if the studies aim to understand adolescent and family experiences in a non-Western context. We wonder whether it is sufficient to merely check the cultural relevance of instruments used when conducting research on international families or if we should be decolonizing the very theories and methods. Should we question the utility and accuracy of the theoretical propositions that attempt to force diverse pathways from around the world into existing conceptualizations instead of expanding that framework to embrace these global pathways?

Like the need to expand theories to embrace diverse contexts, we also propose that changes may be needed to evolve theories for contemporary times. Primary to this question is the conceptualization of virtual contexts with research that focuses on technology-related phenomena. Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2006) socioecological framework proposes that researchers should understand an individual's development by examining the impact of surrounding environments embedded in multiple social systems, including both immediate (e.g., family, school) and indirect contextual (e.g., culture, social norms) settings. Through the bidirectional interactions among different subsystems, individuals shape and are shaped by the social environment. Anchored in the human ecological framework, this edited volume examines the period of adolescence across multiple cultural settings and against the backdrop of a range of contemporary contexts (e.g., rural vs. urban, political unrest/war, rapid globalization). The volume situates the adolescent within the family as the prime socializing agent and highlights how resilience, family processes, and transitions to adulthood intersect with the ecocultural context.

We observe that virtual environments permeate nearly every subsystem and transcend the socioecological context. The COVID-19 global pandemic accelerated global awareness that family life is managed and lived; work and business are carried out; teaching is delivered; entertainment is organized and experienced; medical and mental health treatment and interventions are provided; and all these human functions can be executed in various virtual settings. We believe that as the human ecological context shifts, its dimensions must also expand. Adolescents in contemporary times spend a significant amount of time in these digital environments. We

need to go beyond viewing virtual activities as a technology application but, instead, as a virtual environment in which adolescents are living and developing. As with each of the ecological systems, there are risk and protective factors that promote or detract from adolescent development and this environment is no different. If we approach it like an ecological system, we can move beyond trying to vilify or justify it and begin to explore it. Therefore, we believe that future research will advance our understanding of digital language and communication, describe characteristics of the digital context, examine behaviors and relationships that exist in this environment, and describe the intersectionality of physical and virtual environments. Key to this growing body of research will also be outlining how parenting and adolescent development move fluidly between physical and virtual environments, and more broadly, how they interact in shifting socioecological contexts.

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Part I
Adolescence and Families in Rapidly
Shifting Contexts and Norms

Chapter 1

Adolescents, Families, and Globalization in the Twenty-First Century



Bahira Trask

Introduction

We are currently facing the largest wave of adolescents in human history. According to United Nations estimates, there are globally 1.2 billion young people between the ages of 15 and 24 years, and they comprise about 16% of the global population (UNFPA, 2022; UN Youth, 2022). Currently, the largest group of young people (89%) live in less developed countries, which, and India is the country with the greatest number of youth estimated at about 600 million individuals under the age of 25 (Farcis, 2021). By 2030, the target date for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that comprise the 2030 Agenda of the UN, the global total of adolescents is expected to reach 1.3 billion. Many of the young people living in the poorest nations on the globe have very limited opportunities with respect to schooling, healthcare, paid employment, and access to technology. Their experiences contrast diametrically with young people who are growing up in high-income contexts and families. Adolescents from high income families and developed nations are increasingly globally interconnected, can choose from a wide variety of educational and occupational opportunities, and often have varied opportunities and rich lives. However, in high-income settings, the number of adolescents in proportion to the rest of society is relatively small due to decreases in fertility (UNFPA, 2022). The opposite is true in low-income settings where the number of young people is growing exponentially, and most of these adolescents do not have the luxury of debating what to do with their lives. Instead, in many cases, they are not able to access the skills that are needed to thrive in a highly technological and digitized world economy and are, thus, faced with very limited job and personal opportunities.

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All contemporary young people, however, no matter their social location, are heavily affected by the family contexts in which they live and the external economic, social, and technological forces that come to bear on them. Again, low-income adolescents are most impacted by these changes due to increasing global inequalities. And yet, these same young people are more aware than ever before of the types of lifestyles and work opportunities that may exist but that they are not able to access. These challenges affect every aspect of their lives including their ability to leave their natal homes and begin their own families. Most commonly, due to the lack of economic security, they are not able to marry until they are at a relatively advanced age (UNFPA, 2014). Further complicating this picture is that approximately, half of all adolescents are female, and depending on their specific social context, they may face specific obstacles in attaining an education, entering the paid labor force, and creating families on their own terms (UN Women, 2019).

Compounding the issues described above, issues resulting from the COVID-19 crisis have affected adolescents disproportionately in comparison with other age groups. In 2020, global youth employment fell by 8.7%. In comparison, adult employment fell by 3.7%. This rise in unemployment has not been offset by young people reentering educational contexts. This is leading to a high degree of inactivity among young people (International Labour Organization, 2021). Among them are approximately 600 million girls who have their own needs, desires, and obstacles to overcome. In order to capitalize on this human capital, we need to invest in the education, training, and healthcare of adolescent girls. We need to keep them safe, away from violence and conflict, and provide personal and professional opportunities. In addition, girls should be allowed to reach young adulthood before marrying and having children. However, that is not the case for many young women. In low-income countries, one in three girls is married before she turns 18 (UN Women, 2019). As will be discussed further on, child marriage is detrimental to girls' health and education and limits the realization of their capabilities and dreams.

This chapter examines the linkages between adolescents, families, and globalization in high- and low-income countries. It highlights the specific challenges that are faced by young people depending on their regional location, race and ethnicity, gender, and social context and will suggest how we can best deploy the forces of globalization to create more opportunities and life chances for the youth around the world. This chapter also discusses the role of families in the lives of adolescents and youth. While a Western dominated discourse focuses on individual experiences and often ignores the role of families in young people's lives, empirical evidence indicates that families continue to play a critical role in socializing young people and helping them recognize and expand their capabilities (Esping-Anderson & Billari, 2015). This chapter concludes by touching on programs and policies that can help adolescents thrive and develop their future projections and talents in contexts where we are all increasingly tied to one another in complex, sometimes little understood ways. Young people represent our future as a world. When we give them personal

and professional opportunities, we support their capabilities. However, when adolescents are faced with great insecurity in their personal and professional lives, and they are unable to access the skills and employment opportunities that will allow them to live productive lives, we create a situation of vulnerability and potential unrest. Importantly, they must delay when they start their own families as economic security is foundational to marriage and having children. Given that the growth of young people is primarily in lower-income countries, it is imperative that we pay careful attention to the policies and programs that support the families of adolescents and the adolescents themselves in their quest to move forward with their family, educational, and working lives.

Definitional Issues

As was described in the introduction, there is no globally shared definition about what age group defines the term “youth” or adolescents. The United Nations considers individuals between the ages of 15 and 24 as belonging to this cohort. This definition, which arose as part of the preparations for the International Youth Year in 1985, was endorsed by the General Assembly in 1981 (<https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/youth>). Nonetheless, each country has its own definition about who is considered a “youth” or an adolescent and at what age children become part of this group and then are seen as adults. The lack of definition is very problematic as in many countries, once they turn 18, children are considered to be at the age of majority. These young people become eligible to serve in the military, to vote, and to marry without parental consent. Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, all individuals under the age of 18 are children. Disputes and discrepancies around age of majority can be explained due to cultural differences and the extension of the lifespan. Many adults try to protect young people as long as possible *legally* so that they will not be exploited in the labor market and potentially even in their personal lives. Nonetheless, the lack of a uniform definition makes it extremely difficult to understand who the target audience is, on a range of issues. It also creates obstacles for creating policies that states can implement to assist preparing adolescents and their families for the next phase of their lives.

The Global Contexts in Which Adolescents Are Developing

In high-income settings, the protection of children and adolescents is paramount on social policy agendas. However, the reality of the situation is quite different in other parts of the world. In fact, even in high-income settings such as the United States, adolescents and individuals from underrepresented and low-income groups often do not have the same experiences and opportunities as their peers with

higher resources. In fact, USAID (<https://www.usaid.gov/youthimpact>) presents some recent startling statistics:

- Twenty percent of all adolescents in the developing world are not in education, training, or employment.
- Five million new jobs are needed monthly to keep youth unemployment at its current high rate, twice the adult unemployment rate.
- Sixty-five percent of the population is under age 35; only 6% of political representatives are under 35.
- Forty-three percent of the total number of homicides globally occur among youth.
- Sixty-six percent of young people globally do not feel their government cares about what they think.
- Thirty-four percent of new HIV infections globally occur among adolescents aged 15–24 whose HIV-/AIDS-related deaths have not declined over the past 15 years.

These statistics highlight the unique and perilous situation of today's adolescents. They may be plentiful in number, but many live in contexts where they are not able to realize their capabilities nor are they able to plan their life course. The underlying factors influencing this situation and vulnerabilities of today's young people are many and complex. However, primary are the effects of globalizing processes, changing demographics, and the proliferation of communication technologies. It is the synergy between these varying influences that is creating a complex and often unnavigable environment for so many of today's young people. In order to understand and address the issues facing adolescents today, it is critical to begin this discussion with a more micro-perspective that focuses on the role of families in the lives of young people.

Families Matter to Adolescents

“Family” has become an increasingly contested term in Western academic discourse. Beginning in the late 1960s, feminists specifically criticized the term “family” and the norms it was associated with. Even today, the term “traditional” family conjures up images of heterosexual couples that follow a gendered division of labor with men being the economic providers and women the homemakers (Cherlin, 2020; Stacey, 1996). Contemporary Western social scientists argue that most individuals do not live in these types of families anymore and that it is more useful to look at the individual components of families when trying to understand varied issues such as development, gender socialization, or skills building, for instance (Cherlin, 2020). However, these arguments have led to a lack of consensus about how to define families and how to study them, and thus, families are often ignored in research on adolescents (Coontz, 2000). Instead, adolescents are treated as a stand-alone unit of analysis that is experiencing the world around them in isolation (see, for instance, UNFPA, 2014, Power of 1.8 Billion). This common omission of

family relationships and family context leads to incorrect conclusions about the types of programs and policies that will best aid adolescents as they move into the future. In particular, the issue of gender in families (first highlighted by the feminists of the 1960s and 1970s) plays a crucial role in determining the opportunities that young women are able to access in their contexts. But boys and young men are also very influenced by the intimate sphere of the household. Depending on cultural context, they may have duties and obligations due to their roles as the males in the household, they have certain types of social relationships with their sisters and mothers, and they may have opportunities or challenges that are completely determined by their family lives (Connell, 2005). It is therefore imperative to examine some of the family factors that influence the lives of today's young people.

Family and Demographic Trends and Their Impacts on Adolescents

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, a variety of global family trends have accompanied ideological changes with respect to families. These trends are profoundly important for young people as they are part of these transformations and, concurrently, they influence these changes.

One worldwide critical trend influencing the lives of today's adolescents is the demographic change related to fertility. Overall, fertility is decreasing around the world (UN Women, 2019). This is particularly the case in high-income countries. Global fertility rates have fallen from 3.2 births per woman in 1990 to 2.5 in 2019, and they are expected to decrease even more to 2.2 in 2050 (UN Population, 2019). Currently, about half of all people around the world live in a place where fertility is below 2.1 births per woman over a lifetime. This drop in fertility points in part to changing roles for girls and women. In many places, childbearing is not considered to be women's foremost task any longer. Instead, in some (but not all) parts of the world, girls and women are encouraged to attain an education and enter the paid labor force (UN Women, 2019). Their future opportunities have expanded beyond a family role. However, it is important to note that this drop in fertility and its association with changes in women's roles are not necessarily prevalent in all regions of the world. For instance, in sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania excluding Australia/New Zealand, and North Africa and Western Asia, population growth is actually rising by up to 56% and 46%, respectively. Thus, these are the parts of the world that are seeing an exponential growth in the youth population, and yet, interestingly, even there, girls and women's roles are changing (UN Women, 2019). We now have a situation where changing demographics are influencing the number of youth in societies and their actual roles. However, importantly, families continue to play a primary role in their lives.

Around the world, most children continue to live and be raised in family settings. Today's young people are also being raised in a wide variety of family types – especially in high-income Western countries. According to UN Women (2019),

households composed of a couple with children account for approximately 38.4% of all households worldwide (UN Women, 2019). The structures of these households vary and may be composed of married partners, cohabiting adults, or re-partnered couples. In non-Western countries, families are often composed of nuclear and extended family members, making up about 26.6% of all households. Concurrently, lone-partner households are estimated to come in at about 7.5% (UN Women, 2019). Most commonly, lone-partner families are headed by women (about 84.3%) who have children, are working, and may also be caring for other close relatives. These female-headed households with children are often financially vulnerable and may even be stigmatized and discriminated against depending on social and cultural context (Cherlin, 2020; UN Women, 2019).

Cohabitation is also becoming more common, and children may be raised in these and “other” forms of families such as stepfamilies, female-headed households, and grandparents headed families. In particular, same-sex families have become a recognized, if at times controversial, family form in Western families. Nevertheless, research indicates that same sex couples look for the same things that other men and women search for in their relationships – commitment, stability, companionship, as well as satisfying sexual relationships – and their children tend to be well-adjusted and thrive if given care and love (Coontz, 2000). Young people are thus increasingly aware that “traditional” conceptualizations of family life do not necessarily represent the only path to a fulfilling life course.

Also affecting adolescents the world over is the aging of the global population. Currently, in most high-income countries, there is now a great deal of focus on the aging of populations. As the share of older persons grows, economic and healthcare implications are dominating facets of the social agenda and budgetary concerns. This is particularly the case in the United States and Europe and certain high-income countries in Asia. Simultaneously, however, little attention has been paid to the consequences of population aging for social relationships. In other words, how are individuals of varying ages going to interact with one another in families and communities? And of critical importance to young people and elderly alike is the looming question of whose interests are represented and may dominate in social policies and budgetary priorities now and in the future. This issue has serious consequences for all: given looming budgetary constraints that have been exacerbated by the pandemic, will adolescents be able to access the educational opportunities and skills building that they need in order to be viable in the future? Or will states prioritize the needs of elder persons as a looming crisis of care in particular expands on the horizon (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2007).

Pitting generations against each other to access limited resources is, however, not a solution. Instead, some recent studies indicate that multigenerational interactions and intergenerational solidarity are actually expanding in certain places due to financial stressors on young people (Gulbrandsen & Sandlie, 2015). As adolescent employment is more vulnerable under volatile economic conditions, they become more reliant on their parents for financial support (Fingerman & Birditt, 2020). An exponentially growing number of young people need family financial support in order to enter the next phases of their lives, such as for educational investments and/

or buying or renting their own homes. Without family economic and social supports, it is increasingly difficult for young people to enter stable long-term relationships and start their own families (Gulbrandsen & Sandlie, 2015). However, as Gulbrandsen and Sandlie suggest, “This may have implications not only for family solidarity as such, how the family distributes its resources among and assures the wellbeing of its members, but also for the broader issues of social policy, social inequality, and social integration” (2015, p. 79). While intrafamilial supports are on the one hand a positive phenomenon, private intergenerational transfers are also problematic. If some families can assist their members and others cannot, social inequality increases, and the family support that individuals receive leads to an ever-stronger contributing factor to accessing life opportunities. Family solidarity is thus accomplished at the price of greater divisions within societies.

The lengthening lifespan is clearly influencing family relationships globally with some specific effects in Western countries. The growing popularity of multigenerational living arrangements in the West is one sign that family solidarity is not necessarily weakening as is so often suggested by the media and in the literature (Pew Research Center, 2018). As states retract social supports, and as housing prices grow exponentially, the importance of family membership and family support is only expanding (Fingerman & Birditt, 2020). We are therefore currently faced with a context wherein many societies today, the strengthening of intergenerational family solidarity coexists with increased family dissolution due to separation and divorce. From a scholarly and policy perspective, family dissolution has become the primary focus and of greater academic concern. However, this provides us with a limited perspective on the varying social forces influencing young people. Instead, of just emphasizing family dissolution in our work, we also need to examine which factors lead to increased family solidarity including opportunities for the integration, interdependence, and reciprocity of the youth and the elderly.

Importantly, while popular Western perspectives suggest that families are becoming inconsequential, contemporary scholarship indicates that long-term relationships and marriage continue to matter to most people including today’s adolescents (Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015). And even divorce, while spiking higher especially in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, has remained relatively steady or is even declining in many Western countries (Berger & Carlson, 2020; Smock & Schwartz, 2020). In an overview of European family life, Esping-Andersen and Billari (2015) suggested that the social scientific prediction toward “less family: fewer marriages and children; greater couple instability” may actually not be an accurate portrayal of contemporary intimate life. They also stated that “the projected erosion of the family is problematic and possibly invalid....Studies of family values and attitudes show a surprising degree of preference stability...” (p. 3). Their work concurs with a recent analysis by UN Women (2019) that stated that “in many regions, including Central and Southern Asia, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia and Northern Africa and Western Asia, long-lasting heterosexual marriages continue to be universal” (p. 50). Thus, we can see that when examined cross-culturally, worldwide trends indicate that there is a great deal of variation with respect to family life based on regionality, economic conditions, social class, education, policies, and

other social factors. However, the role of family members, family socialization, and family identity continues to be foundational to most individuals.

Families and Adolescent Development

From a social scientific perspective, it is long accepted that cross-culturally, families are the primary vehicles of socialization for children and adolescents and that virtually every aspect of their future lives is influenced by these initial experiences (Karoly et al., 2005). What is less commonly understood is that families continue to influence the development of young people even as they go through puberty and begin to venture out on their own. Socialization involves learning the roles, norms, and values of a certain culture and society. Extensive research indicates that very early experiences are formative for individual development. Infants attain their first sense of self, other people, and social relationships through their initial interactions with their primary caregivers. While in the United States we have emphasized the role of the mother in early socialization and development, there is an increasing scholarly and popular realization that fathers, siblings, and other closely involved individuals also provide crucial role models, as well as nurturance for young children (Palkovitz, 2002). This is certainly true cross-culturally where ethnographic evidence indicates that children are raised in a wide variety of family forms with all sorts of caregivers including those who are not biologically related to them (Stacey, 1996). And yet, the bonds within family settings continue to be among the most influential for young people and often play a crucial role in their future success.

Incorporating a Gender Lens on Youth Issues

Discussions about adolescents and young people in general are incomplete if they do not emphasize the gendered experiences that characterize social life in families, communities, and the larger world. Primarily in the West, academic discourse about adolescents often ignore the gender dimension and refer to young people as a homogenous group that has the same experiences, challenges, and opportunities. Yet, this generalization about adolescent cohorts ignores the realities of gender inequalities which as Connell (2005) stated, “..... are embedded in a multidimensional structure of relationships between women and men, which, as the modern sociology of gender shows, operates at every level of human experience, from economic arrangements, culture, and the state to interpersonal relationships and individual emotions” (p. 1801).

In many regions of the world, and also in some Western low-income contexts, girls and young women continue to face severe obstacles in realizing their full capabilities. Especially, rural girls and women in Western and non-Western regions tend not to have access to resources, and they have limited decision-making abilities

within the family, the household, and the community. This gender inequality remains embedded in cultural ideals and social relationships despite the varying modernizing influences that are rapidly sweeping around the world (Kabeer, 2005; Trask, 2014). Many parts of the world still are characterized by highly patriarchal values where boys in families are treated very differently from girls. This becomes particularly obvious around puberty when girls' lives often become more constricted while the boundaries for boys expand (Plan UK, 2015). Especially in rural areas, as girls enter adolescence, their mobility and free time decrease and their domestic work increases. Issues such as the reputation of the household, concerns around keeping girls sexually "modest," or even the childcare and domestic responsibilities of the household lead to some families forcing girls to drop out of school and work within the home (Mensch et al., 2003). In some areas of the world such as rural South Asia or the Middle East, girls are still perceived as draining household finances due to the costs associated with their marriages, and investments in boys are prioritized (Hallman & Roca, 2007).

Young women's restricted ability to decide the trajectory of their lives which is often accompanied by very limited economic resources puts them at a severe disadvantage in the global economy. Girls from low income households are often forced to prioritize domestic chores over education and are not able to access schooling, nutrition, healthcare, and technology in the same manner as the boys in their families (Plan UK, 2015). Unfortunately, child marriage continues to be a serious problem for girls. Currently, about 15 million girls marry before the age of 18, and the number is growing due to the increase in youth populations in those areas where this tradition is practiced (UN Women, 2019). Child marriage puts these young girls at risk through early pregnancies and the possibility of attaining sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS. Child brides are also more likely to suffer from violence at the hands of their husbands (UNFPA, 2014). A Western feminist perspective that highlights the progress of gender equality, and gender convergence with respect to socialization and educational and occupational opportunities, ignores the fact that girls from low-income households and settings, especially in non-Western societies, thus, may have very different experiences. Moreover, many studies speak of girls and young women with little recognition that parents, siblings, and extended families "practice" gender and enforce patriarchal values that will put them at a lifelong disadvantage.

Families remain foundational contexts for empowering girls and young women. The family group can either support or constrain a girl's ability to access educational or professional opportunities. It is important to recognize that in many regions and cultures of the world, the men in girls' lives still determine their life choices. Therefore, one key to assisting young girls succeed is to educate the boys and men in their families and encourage them to promote gender equality (Connell, 2005; UN Women, 2019). A Western discourse that focuses specifically only on the individual and often ignores gendered experiences obfuscates the critical role that families continue to play; we therefore need to target family members with programs and policies that support all their members, including the female ones (Trask, 2014). Moreover, gender equality and gender empowerment need to be understood,

appreciated, and promoted as rights for all young people around the world. These programs and policies also need to account for the rapidly changing contexts in which adolescents, and specifically girls, are developing. Understanding the role that globalization is playing is, thus, imperative.

Understanding the Impacts of Globalization

Today's adolescents are growing up in an interconnected world where everyone, irrespective of social location, is affected by the processes of globalization. While globalization is a contested term, there is general agreement that the phenomenon is associated with the compression of space and time. We are able to experience far-away happenings simultaneously as they occur and can be in touch with each other over great physical distances (Hermans-Konopka & Hermans, 2010).

Globalization is a complicated controversial phenomenon for which there is no agreed upon definition. Most generally, it refers to varied interwoven economic and political processes and is understood as the increasingly rapid bridging of geographic and cultural distances. Is globalization a new process? This is often at the core of debates about its origins and consequences. There are those who argue that globalization is nothing new – that the voyages of the Middle Ages were already part of a globalizing process. And then there are others who insist that globalization is symbolic and a rearrangement of time and space, that it represents a new and faster way of bridging time and geographical spaces. However, most commonly globalization is linked to economic and political processes (Beck, 2009). Those concerned with globalization tend to focus on the movement of money, goods, and labor across state boundaries and the expansion of corporate interests across national lines. From an economic and political perspective, globalization is also understood to be a major driver of the growing inequalities within and between countries. As Giddens (2003, p. 33) noted, globalization has “create[d] a world of winners and losers, a few on the fast track to prosperity, the majority condemned to a life of misery and despair.”

Less common but also prevalent is a focus on globalization as a process that has changed the relationship of states with their citizens. As the market has become dominant, states have pulled away from supplying basic social supports (also known as the “welfarestate”) (Turner, 2014). And globalization has also been interpreted as a cultural process that is rapidly changing societies. For instance, Arjun Appadurai (1996), an initial leading scholar of globalization, wrote that the “central problem in today’s global interactions is the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization” (p. 32). Appadurai was addressing the fundamental dichotomy inherent in globalization: the spread of ideas, values, and practices that lead to shared understandings but are also reinterpreted in local contexts. At times, this referred to as the “glocalization” of cultures. Adolescents tend to be at the nexus of these processes. This push-pull of globalizing forces is also associated with identity formation. Bhatia pointed out that new ideas about who we can be and how we can

live are spreading rapidly to far reaches of the globe. Thus, globalization is an important driver of new cultural identities and practices that may be particularly attractive to young people and particularly because of the critical juncture that they may be in their lives (Bhatia, 2020). Through social media and other communication technologies, they are aware of lifestyles, consumer goods, and values and practices around the globe. They may or may not be able to access some of these trends and adapt them in their contexts. Or at times, adolescents are caught between conflicting value systems that contradict what they know from their families and communities. For instance, they may be aware that young people in Western countries often date and even cohabit before marriage – however, these practices are far removed from the traditional arrangements that their families advocate. Young people thus, inadvertently, find themselves at the center of public and private debates about Westernization, the preservation of cultural traditions and values, and questions about how to live their lives.

It is important to remember that globalization is also closely associated with the spread of communication technologies. While earlier works viewed specifically the Internet with suspicion (Valentine, 2006), today's research indicates that communication technologies have in many ways been beneficial for young people (Walker, 2021). Social media and the Internet in general provide tools for young people to communicate and encourage greater self-disclosure and communication than they were able to engage in in the past. Moreover, the ubiquitous nature of digital technologies allows young people to develop the skills that they will need in future careers (Walker, 2021). But again, it is important to remember that many young people around the world do not have equivalent access to digital technologies. Thus, the inequalities that are being highlighted throughout this paper extend not just to attaining economic and education resources but also to technological access.

While there is a great deal of scholarly attention on the economic, political, and communication aspects of globalization, there has been little analysis of how these processes affect adolescents and their family lives. For many around the world, it is unclear what opportunities they are able to access in the present and how they will be affected by global changes in the coming years (for instance, with skill development for future jobs and the formation of their own families). This omission is dangerous as adolescents represent the next generation, and how they fare will determine social, economic, and political life globally. For instance, when young people cannot become economically independent due to the lack of paid employment, they are forced to delay family formation and having children (Trask, 2020). This affects individuals on a personal or microlevel but also has societal implications such as leading to the presence of fewer workers and consumers and the lack of caretakers for the elderly. In regions, where there is high economic unemployment for youth, social unrest can also set in, destabilizing societies.

Thus, we have a situation where in a changing world young people experience dichotomous situations depending on their regional location; Their racial, ethnic, religious, or cultural identification; their gender orientation; and/or socioeconomic contexts. However, globalization and its effects are even more

complex than a superficial description implies. Globalization is increasingly influenced by a neoliberal economic model that places the locus of control on the individual and their actions.

“Neoliberalism’s emphasis on the self as the sole manager of the uncertainty and risk associated with (post)modern life has indeed meant that young people are no longer just ‘a risk’ as previously perceived but also terribly at risk in the context of the new global order of late capitalism and postmodernity” (Kennelly et al., 2009, p. 257).

While globalization is at the root of much of life’s uncertainties, adolescents are increasingly being held responsible for their own future successes or failures with little regard for the structures and government supports that may have existed for previous generations in Western and non-Western contexts. Instead, a neoliberal emphasis on being an individual entrepreneur who creates their own life course is upheld as the paragon of greatest success. What is ignored in this perspective on young people’s lives is that the starting line is incredibly uneven today. For instance, one cannot compare the life of a young woman in a rural village in Bangladesh with the experiences of a white middle-class girl in the United States. And yet, a contemporary global Western-led discourse emphasizes “women’s rights,” “educational opportunities,” and “me too movements” as universal phenomena that are experienced in a similar manner across the world. As has been pointed out previously, this dominant discourse at times is certainly not applicable in non-Western and even specific Western low-income contexts.

Despite all of these controversies around the definitions and processes of globalization, it is today accepted that global processes are influencing every part of the globe. Specifically, ideas about gender roles and gender identity, the dominance of couple relationships based on “love,” and the right to personal freedom are spreading around the world and are reinterpreted in local contexts. However, adolescents have an ambiguous relationship to globalization. Given where they are in their development, they are flexible enough to adjust to the rapid changes happening around them, especially with respect to communication technologies and skill development when they are given the opportunity. Less clear and perhaps less obvious are the major changes that globalization and a variety of accelerating family trends have inflicted on the trajectory of the lives of adolescents. Thus, we need to recognize that globalization is associated with challenges – but it also provides opportunities. This phenomenon, and as it relates to adolescents and their families, needs to be understood from these conflicting perspectives.

Adolescents, Globalization, and Love

A crucial ideational shift for adolescents has been the worldwide spread of the concept of “love” as foundational to couple formation. Globalizing processes are playing a critical role in spreading new notions of couple formation around the world. While both in the West and other parts of the world, parents and extended family

used to play an important role in helping choose spouses, this initial phase to starting new families has been radically transformed in most locations around the world (Padilla et al., 2007). Especially in non-Western areas, adolescents are embracing the concept of couple relationships founded on romantic, sexual love as this is correlated with being “modern” (Donner, 2012). Romantic notions that emphasize love relationships have been accompanied by rearrangements in families with respect to feelings of obligation and duty to parents and siblings in particular. However, the changing values around love and marriage are not just the result of romantic depictions on social media and in television and movies as is so often assumed. Instead, changes in family formation are closely related to other worldwide transformations including changing gender roles for women and increased educational opportunities that have pushed the age for first marriage upward. Also, despite current discourses in the West about the “decline” of marriage and families, empirical evidence points to other trends. In fact, contemporary young people *do* want to enter intimate relationships and form families – however, in general they are waiting longer to marry and have children (Esping-Anderson & Billari, 2015). Large-scale surveys such as those that are conducted by major research institutes like the Pew Research group indicate that even in the United States, often considered a highly individualistic country, people consider their “families” as their primary source of emotional support (Pew Research Center, 2015). These types of surveys also indicate that young people still prioritize finding a long-term partner and a many of them want at some point to have children. Ethnographic work indicates that in places such as Mexico (Hirsch, 2003), India (Sandhya, 2009), and China, (Ji, 2015), young people are engaging more openly in frank discussion about sex and personal fulfillment in relationships and they are seeking marriage partners who will enhance their sense of well-being. One example of these changes comes from the work of Hirsch (2003) in a small Mexican town. They found that until recently most couples did not marry for romantic love but in order to find a partner to take care of highly gendered home and work responsibilities. These transformations, while on the one hand liberating, are also leading to increased anxiety as the responsibility for finding suitable partners now falls on the individual instead of family members. However, despite these challenges, young people the world over have embraced a companionate, egalitarian partnership model that is spread through globalizing forces. The social theorist Anthony Giddens has argued that as financial and communication systems have gained precedence over traditional institutions such as family and community, intimacy has been liberated from local restraints (1992). Thus, a focus on individual self-fulfillment and development is increasingly embraced by today’s youth.

Globalization and Changes in the Life Course

All of the trends discussed above intersect in complex ways. Changes in family life, demographics, and globalizing processes are influencing the trajectory of adolescents’ lives. The life course of young people, which used to have clearly demarcated

stages in most cultures around the world, has been drastically altered and is now extremely uncertain. Generally speaking, contemporary social life is increasingly characterized by uncertainty and volatility caused by globalization. The sequential order to life that used to be taken for granted by young people has been upended. While acknowledging some variation, adolescents in the past could expect to finish a certain amount of schooling, find life sustaining employment, and begin their own families at a relatively young age. For the most part, both higher resource and poorer young people followed this predictable trajectory. Globalization, however, has altered the traditional life course (Turner, 2014). Today, job markets are constantly changing, and having to learn new skills is becoming a lifetime undertaking. The majority of adolescents realize that whatever schooling or training they may access will in all likelihood not be enough to sustain permanent employment over the course of their lives. This makes them hesitant about forming permanent partnerships and taking on the responsibility of caring for children. Simultaneously, life's necessities are becoming increasingly expensive and for many unattainable. For instance, housing, a fundamental human right, is increasingly beyond the reach of the average middle-class citizen in many parts of the world (Gulbrandsen & Sandlie, 2015). Young people are thus, faced with uncertain economic and familial prospects while constantly being reminded through social media, in particular, that there are others who live what looks from the outside to be enviably easy and materially rich lives.

Thus, we have a twenty-first-century situation where the link between globalization and adolescents creates a disturbing, unpredictable volatility that characterizes the lives of today's young people. That said, however, we should not view young people as the victims of a runaway global culture. We need to always be mindful and acknowledge every individual's agency and understand that adolescents themselves are also always adapting to and influencing the global changes that are sweeping around us.

How Do We Support Adolescents in Varying Contexts?

As has been discussed above, the situation for young people in a globalizing world is highly complex due to a wide variety of interconnected factors, which raises the question about what supports and policies would have the most wide-reaching and positive effects for adolescents. Transnational organizations like the United Nations and USAID are heavily invested in exactly this issue. Primarily, they suggest investing in strengthening adolescent programming and mainstreaming and integrating youth issues into all policy frameworks. One example comes from USAID which has invested over \$400 million dollars through YouthPower for cross-sectoral youth programs around the globe. They also advocate for engaging young people in youth leadership and youth networks, as well as involving them directly in policy formation that touches their lives. For instance, adolescent programming that focuses on skill-building, employment, and health is increasingly composed of stakeholders

from throughout their regional areas and includes many young people themselves (<https://www.usaid.gov/youthimpact>). In addition, there is an enormous need for better data. We currently know a great deal about the situation of young people in high-income settings. Our theoretical frameworks and data gathering methods are geared toward them, and thus, the conclusions drawn about their lives are specific to a very particular sociohistorical moment. However, their situations are not necessarily equivalent or even relevant when examined cross-culturally. For instance, we do not know the long-term effects on the mental and physical health of adolescents living in conflict areas or in places with little if any access to educational or professional opportunities.

Conclusion

Empirical evidence indicates that families continue to function as a source of resilience for adolescents and that the extent to which families mitigate risk factors plays a crucial role in developmental outcomes (Bogenschneider & Corbett, 2010). Despite some claims that environmental and peer influences are stronger influences on adolescent development, research indicates that parents provide material and social capital for their children, act as buffers between their children and harmful environmental influences, and continue throughout a child's life course to influence its emotional, physical, and social well-being. This crucial relationship is basic to understanding any aspect of young people's lives in combination with contextual factors such as regionality and access to economic and educational resources.

Families create and raise the next generation of citizens and productive workers, raise caring and committed citizens, make efficient investments to reach societal goals, and provide an effective way of promoting positive child and youth development (Bogenschneider & Corbett, 2010). Empirical, longitudinal studies illustrate that when families are supported through appropriate policies, societies benefit through having a caring, committed group of citizens. A focus on adolescents around the world, thus, requires us to be mindful of their family and community contexts.

The sustainability of our planet is dependent in large part on the next generation – how it is being raised, what options these young people will have, and which challenges they will confront. It is this new generation that will live with the effects of changes to legal frameworks, climate change and environmental deterioration, and the accompanying risks to well-being and housing shortages (Heckman, 2006). How the youth are supported in their healthy development is a critical aspect of attaining the Sustainable Development Goals. Raising healthy, well-adjusted adolescents who are aware of their capabilities and able to access opportunities is key to strengthening families and to the future of our world. Family sustainability, maintaining and strengthening relationships between family members, and creating a sense of unity are foundational to societies and creating a more peaceful, equitable world.

Globalization has fractured the social, political, and economic landscapes that we are familiar with. As was discussed above, less than 50 years ago, young people the world over could predict most of their life course: that they would finish school, attain employment and financial stability, marry and begin family life, and achieve economic and social independence (Shanahan, 2000). However, as Kennelly, Poyntz, and Ugor stated, “In contrast, ‘for young people today, the job market is less predictable, and training is a matter of constant retooling for the market’s shifting demands’ Moreover, even such ‘retooling’ and the accumulation of different certifications cannot guarantee jobs and meaningful social futures for vast segments of contemporary youth” (2009, p. 257). Globalization has upended the lives of many, but especially the potential future lives of adolescents. As Kennelly, Poyntz, and Ugor pointed out, “Globalization is thus held answerable for the unpredictability of young people’s lives because it entails sweeping socioeconomic changes that fracture the project of futurity—youth” (2009, p. 257). However, as has been discussed above, young people are also active agents at a point in their lives where they can reshape themselves and take advantage of the opportunities that global processes may present. We, thus, need to put into place the programs and policies that will help them build on their talents and grow their capabilities. We need to harness the forces of globalization for good and achieve as Kennelly et al. (2009) stated “new social spaces.” Adolescents are the ones who are at the forefront of creating these new spaces. We need to empower them and allow them the access to the tools they need to achieve this goal.

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Chapter 2

The Role of Digital Technology in Adolescent Autonomy Development: A Four-Factor Model and a Global Perspective



Xiaoran Sun

Introduction

Autonomy development, or the progression toward independent functioning and the control over one's life, is one of the most critical developmental tasks during adolescence (Allen & Hauser, 1996; Garber & Little, 2001; Koepke & Denissen, 2012; Oudekerk et al., 2015; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986; Yu et al., 2018; Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2006). This process is linked to other important developmental tasks during adolescence (e.g., identity development), as well as a host of well-being measures and future outcomes. Among the many factors that impact autonomy development, family relationships, processes, and dynamics appear to play important roles (Collins & Laursen, 2004; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986; Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2006). Presently, digital technology plays an important role in adolescents' and families' lives, including its impacts on the family dynamics that are tied to adolescents' development toward autonomy and independence (Dworkin et al., 2019; Sun & McMillan, 2018). In the extant literature, there have been discussions and divergent opinions about whether the existence and use of digital technology promote or hinder adolescents' autonomy development, including in their interactions with parents (Ehrenreich et al., 2020; Ling, 2004; Ribak, 2009; Sun et al., 2023; Yang, 2018). Whether the pervasiveness of digital technology in their lives makes adolescents more independent or (inter)dependent seems to be a complex question. This chapter provides a systematic review of scholarly perspectives

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and research findings about the role of digital technology in adolescents' autonomy development and the involved parent-adolescent dynamics. Specifically, the review is organized according to Beyers et al.' (2003) four-factor model of adolescent autonomy development to discuss how digital technology contributes to each factor. Then, in line with this book's global scope, this content summarizes ways in which digital technology influences the autonomy factors, mainly based on prior studies conducted in countries other than the United States. Finally, this chapter concludes with suggestions for future directions in this research.

The Four-Factor Model of Autonomy Development: Digital Technology and Each Factor

Autonomy is a complex construct that has been defined and conceptualized in a multitude of ways over the years. In an attempt to represent the varying dimensions and components of autonomy conceptualized by various scholars, a structural model for autonomy during middle to late adolescence was proposed by Beyers et al. (2003). Specifically, this model presents four factors that constitute autonomy, namely, *connectedness*, *separation*, *detachment*, and *agency*. These factors are different but related, reflecting various dimensions and processes of autonomy development.

The multifactorial nature of autonomy development means that a comprehensive understanding about how digital technology impacts autonomy requires understanding the role of digital technology in each factor of autonomy. In extant discussions about technology and adolescent autonomy, however, scholars have mainly treated autonomy as a generic term without recognizing different factors or components of it that can be influenced by technology in different ways. To address this limitation and advance a comprehensive understanding about the technology-autonomy relation, the following sections present each of the four factors as defined by Beyers et al. (2003) and then review and discuss how digital technology shapes each factor respectively.

Connectedness

In the four-factor model of autonomy, connectedness includes emotional closeness, availability, support, trust, and mutual and reciprocal communication (Beyers et al., 2003), which provides a secure base for adolescents' individuation (Lopez & Gover, 1993) and has positive implications for developmental outcomes (Lamborn & Groh, 2009; Law et al., 2013). The pervasiveness and ubiquity of digital technology provide parents and adolescents with a variety of communication tools and platforms for them to maintain connectedness despite physical distances. For example, Ling (2004) suggests that the mobile phone has created a "type of umbilical cord between parent and child" (p.100) with the constant accessibility that it brings to family members' lives. It becomes unprecedentedly easy for parents to get involved with adolescents through calling, texting, social media interactions, and many more

channels (Rudi & Dworkin, 2018). With mobile devices, computers, and the Internet, communication extends to the digital/virtual context in addition to the face-to-face context (Navarro & Tudge, 2022), where parents can provide emotional and logistical support to adolescents (Fletcher et al., 2018). The digital space also provides more opportunities for bonding and developing trust.

Despite positive implications, the existence and use of technology may also compromise connectedness. An example is the phenomenon of “technofence,” where parents’ and/or adolescents’ use of technology for activities other than family communication can distract their face-to-face interactions and reduce the quality of their time spent together, disrupting their connectedness (Mackay et al., 2022; McDaniel & Radesky, 2018). In addition, differences between parents and adolescents in their attitudes toward technology and rules around the use may lead to tensions and conflicts in their relationships (Hessel et al., 2017; Wartella et al., 2014), which may in turn disrupt their emotional closeness and trust. Moreover, even though constant accessibility is a possibility granted by digital technology, in reality parents and/or adolescents may have different understandings and expectations about boundaries in their use of technology (Sun & McMillan, 2018). The asynchronous nature of many digital communication approaches such as texting and social media interactions means that their communication is not necessarily reciprocal or mutual (Pielot et al., 2014), which also puts whether digital communication can contribute to the mutual reciprocity in their relationships into question.

Separation

Separation refers to the process of establishing psychological distance from the parents, which includes adolescents’ de-idealization and less dependence from parents, as well as seeking privacy and pursuing secrecy (Beyers et al., 2003). Although separation can be inversely related to connectedness, findings about its association with adolescent outcomes are mixed (Koepke & Denissen, 2012; Lamborn & Groh, 2009; Lopez & Gover, 1993). Just as technology can contribute to a sense of connectedness for teens, technology’s implications for separation may also be twofold. Digital devices and platforms can promote separation in many ways. For many adolescents, digital activity represents a personal domain (Hessel et al., 2017). Knowledge about technology and information that they gain through the digital platforms can contribute to a sense of power in the family, especially when parents are less knowledgeable about new technologies (Sun & McMillan, 2018), potentially accelerating the process of parent de-idealization. Smartphones, the Internet, and social media provide more constant and accessible channels for adolescents to connect to the world outside the family, including to peers and the larger society, which can help to create psychological distance from parents (Collins & Laursen, 2004). Moreover, with the constant accessibility made possible by mobile phones/smartphones, parents can feel more comfortable and secure to “let go” of the adolescents and grant them more freedom for explorations (Devitt & Roker, 2009;

Ehrenreich et al., 2020). This shift may also create more space for psychological distance and independence.

On the other hand, there are cases where technology may slow down the process of separation or make it more difficult. The use and ownership of digital devices can create the sense of constant accessibility between parents and adolescents (Ling, 2004), which may hinder the establishment of psychological distance and make it easier and more accessible for adolescents to depend on parents no matter where they go. Relatedly, it is easier than ever for parents to exert remote monitoring on adolescents through approaches such as parental control apps (Ghosh et al., 2018) and digital location tracking (Boesen et al., 2010; Burnell et al., 2023), which may prevent psychological separation despite physical distances. The ability to readily check in with adolescents may predispose parents toward overinvolvement and intrusiveness (Sun et al., 2023) that limit opportunities for separation and secrecy. Even though adolescents tend to treat their technology use as a personal domain, some parents, in contrast, are more likely to treat adolescents' use as a domain on which they can check digital content and set limits (Hessel et al., 2017), which can make it challenging for adolescents to establish privacy and secrecy through technology. In addition, along with the widespread use of digital technology, the generations growing up using digital devices (e.g., "iGen") tend to spend less time physically outside home and seem to have less interest in independence (Twenge, 2017), which all seems to have posed challenges onto adolescents' separation from the family.

Detachment

Detachment refers to cool rejections, disengagement, distrust, and alienation in parent-adolescent relationships (Beyers et al., 2003). Detachment has been considered as an unhealthy autonomy factor that has negative implications for adolescent developmental outcomes (Lamborn & Groh, 2009). Detachment and connectedness are highly related in opposite directions even though they are still considered as different dimensions for autonomy (Beyers et al., 2003), and thus the effects of technology on connectedness can also be considered as effects on detachment in reversed ways. For example, the opportunities of availability, bonding, closeness, and support that technology provides for parent-adolescent relationships can all be considered as preventative for detachment. In contrast, the conflicts and tensions involving technology use (Wartella et al., 2014) and arising in the process of (re)negotiating the parent-adolescent power structure and boundaries regarding technology use (Sun & McMillan, 2018) may all contribute to alienation and distrust in their relationships, especially if the conflicts are not managed properly.

Beyond the ways in which technology impacts connectedness and thereby influences detachment in opposite directions, the use of digital technology, especially dysfunctional use patterns, may exacerbate the detachment dynamics between adolescents and their parents. In particular, problematic use and addictions to smartphones and

the Internet have been shown to be negatively associated with family relationships and suggested to alienate the youth from parents (Hawi & Samaha, 2017; Kim & Kim, 2015; Özaslan et al., 2021).

Agency

Agency is a social-cognitive aspect of autonomy that encompasses competence, self-reliance, and self-determination (Beyers et al., 2003). It is considered as a healthy psychological construct that has positive impacts on adolescent individuation and developmental outcomes (Lamborn & Groh, 2009; Parto & Besharat, 2011). Although agency has been found to be a factor that has low correlations with the other three factors of autonomy, the ways in which technology contributes to separation may also apply to explain how technology influences agency. In particular, the information and knowledge gained through digital platforms can empower adolescents and contribute to their learning and competence (Sun & McMillan, 2018). The content and activities that adolescents have on their personal digital devices, especially when treated as parts of the personal domain (Hessel et al., 2017), would contribute to their self-governance. Owning digital devices – especially mobile phones – can be viewed as a “badge of maturity” (Ling, 2004; p.115) and a marker for self-reliance (Moreno et al., 2019). Further, expanding to a larger context, digital platforms such as social media grant the youth more opportunities to contribute to public opinions and make advocacy and social influences (Velasquez & LaRose, 2015), which may also promote the agency development.

In contrast, as described regarding its implications for separation, technology may make it easier for adolescents to depend on their parents more than ever, which potentially would also hinder the agency development. In addition to dependency on parents, adolescents may also have an increasing sense of dependency and reliance on digital devices, especially when nowadays people have to rely on digital technology so much – ranging from direction navigations to social interactions and financing. The heavy reliance on digital devices, especially passive use and consumptions (as opposed to active use and productions; Reeves et al., 2021; Verduyn et al., 2015), may hurt the sense of self-determination and self-reliance.

Summary of the Four Factors

Several insights can be gleaned from the presentation of the roles of digital technology in each of the domains of autonomy development. First, just as the four factors overlap with, and relate to one another (Beyers et al., 2003), the implications of technology across the four factors are also intertwined. Some aspects of technology simultaneously influence more than one autonomy factor. Second, influences of technology on each of the factors are usually two-sided, with technology having the

capacity to both facilitate and impair each dimension of autonomy development. This suggests that the role of digital technology in adolescent autonomy development is intricate, without necessarily pulling adolescents to one direction toward or against independence and individuation.

Third, studies noted to illustrate each of the factors of autonomy development are mostly correlational in nature. Likely, influences are bidirectional. For example, although the ownership of digital devices can contribute to psychological maturity and self-determination, it is also likely that adolescents' maturity increases the need for device ownership. Another example is that even though addictions and problematic use can contribute to detachment, research has also suggested that rejections, conflicts, and lack of secure attachment in parent-adolescent relationships make adolescents more prone to problematic Internet use (Wei et al., 2020; Yao et al., 2014).

Finally, whether and how digital technology impacts each factor of autonomy also depends on the larger social context. Ownership of digital devices and use of technology have been increasing at an accelerating rate. Digital technology is becoming a ubiquitous reality of our daily living – a phenomenon known as the “digitization of life” (Reeves et al., 2021). The fast development of immersive digital technology, such as virtual reality and the construction of “the metaverse” (Herrman & Browning, 2021), and of generative artificial intelligence, such as ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2023), is leading us to more imaginable and unimaginable directions in which technology is intertwined with individuals' and families' lives and with adolescent development. In short time, reliance on digital technology will become increasingly normalized in society. It is possible that within a certain range, these changes and developments would make technology use less problematic and more beneficial for connectedness and agency. The relations that we are seeing today regarding the links between technology and the various factors in autonomy development may change in the near future.

Digital Technology and Adolescent Autonomy Development Around the Globe

The process of autonomy development diverges in many important ways across various societies and/or is impacted by cultural variables. This section presents a review of research that examines the impacts of digital technology on adolescents around the globe.

Information, Knowledge, and Skills

How do parents and youth perceive the role that digital technology platforms play in adolescents' lives? What role does digital technology play in autonomy development? Studies in different parts of the world suggest a range of different uses of

technology, and that technology grants youth various opportunities related to autonomy development. For example, obtaining information is one of the major purposes for adolescents' Internet use and is more often than Internet activities such as downloading, playing, and shopping, according to a cross-cultural study conducted in Spain, Ireland, and countries in Latin America including the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Chile, and Bolivia (Martínez De Morentin et al., 2014). Learning new information and knowledge is perceived by parents in Spain as the primary purpose for the youth to use the Internet (Álvarez et al., 2013); by adolescents in Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay as a major online activity (Trucco & Palma, 2020); and by the youth in Abu Dhabi as a major reason for using social networking sites (Badri et al., 2017). In another study in Chile and El Salvador, adolescents perceive social media as a platform to expand knowledge in a fun way (Beltrán et al., 2019). Further, in Bangladesh, adolescent participants reported using YouTube videos to learn and develop constructive skills in such domains as cooking, arts and crafts, dancing, debating, creating science projects, and language (Huq et al., 2021). These adolescents also reported using the Internet to gain knowledge about religions, self-care, and sex, which helps them to know better about the society and about themselves and to make decisions for themselves.

The knowledge and skills that adolescents gain through digital technology not only contribute to their agency directly but also foster their autonomy in their interactions with parents. For example, the study in Bangladesh also found that adolescents can have a voice in family decisions on events such as purchasing, trips, and medications, by finding useful information online, and that their skills learned online, such as electrical skills, are valued by the families (Huq et al., 2021). Further, adolescents serve as brokers in technology learning for their family and introduce new information to parents, a phenomenon that has been observed in countries such as Chile (Correa, 2014). Based on the same study sample in Chile, Correa (2016) also found that the youth substantially influence their parents for purchasing technology devices, such as through negotiations and reasoning – practices that can facilitate their agency development. Through these family processes, adolescents also can gain power in their relationships with parents and develop de-idealization and independence from parents – dimensions for separation.

Identity Exploration and Expression

In the virtual space created through digital technology, adolescents get to explore and develop their own identities, make decisions about themselves, and express themselves as individuals. All of these can contribute to both their agency and separation from parents. A study in Italy explored youths' opinions about Internet use, especially those regarding their identity exploration and formation (Borca et al., 2015). Respondents highlighted Internet as a space that cultivates their interests, provides new content and sensations, and allows them to experiment with different identities and reveal certain aspects of themselves. On the Internet, they also get to

make independent choices and decisions and identify or de-identify themselves from other people. Further, youth mentioned that their Internet use helped them to differentiate their identity from parents – a process that can facilitate their individuation and separation.

The role of digital technology in facilitating identity explorations, self-expressions, and individual decision-making has been found both in a study among the youth in a Maya community in Mexico (Manago & Pacheco, 2019) and another study among adolescents in Chile and El Salvador (Beltrán et al., 2019). In particular, the study in Chile and El Salvador found that adolescents perceive social media as an important space for them to explore, establish, and express their own identities. Adolescents in this study report that they use social media to explore and express their interests, personalities, and thoughts and feelings. They believe that social media makes it easier for them to express themselves, though sometimes they also perceive the self-presentation on social media as being too individualistic, which may contrast with their collectivistic cultural background. Further, despite the self-expression opportunities granted by social media, in conservative cultural contexts such as Qatar, young women report still feeling restrained from expressing their identities, including from using their own pictures as profile photo (Rajakumar, 2012).

In the process of self-expression such as among adolescents in Chile and El Salvador, they also perceive social media interactions to contribute to their self-esteem by feeling accepted, recognized, and validated, though at the same time negative experiences such as criticism, lack of recognition, and social comparisons may reduce their self-esteem (Beltrán et al., 2019). In addition, the youth perceive the possibilities, perspectives, and resources provided by digital platforms as helpful for them to gain independence and for their transitions into adulthood (Manago & Pacheco, 2019). Related to transitions into adulthood, the online environment also provides the youth with opportunities to explore their aspirations and dreams and decide on future career paths – an important part of identity development, according to reports in Afghan (Hossaini, 2018) and Bangladesh (Huq et al., 2021).

Social Relationships

Expanding social relationships outside the family is an important part of autonomy development (Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2006). Nowadays, digital technology allows adolescents around the globe to establish social relationships, including friendships and romantic relationships, more easily outside their families. Adolescents use the Internet and social media to maintain their current relationships and develop new relationships based on interests and online communities. For example, a study among Flemish late adolescents found that digital communication is especially helpful for participants to maintain precollege friendships during the transition to college life, which can contribute to their sense of belonging (Abeele & Roe, 2011). Likewise, adolescents reported that social media is essential in their

communication and relationships with peers, especially with those who are far away or those they rarely meet, according to studies in Italy (Borca et al., 2015), Sweden (Axelsson, 2010), Chile and El Salvador (Beltrán et al., 2019), and immigrant communities in Spain (Casado et al., 2019). These studies also found that in adolescents' opinions, the Internet helps them to both make new friends, such as through shared interests and opinions, and establish romantic relationships (Beltrán et al., 2019; Borca et al., 2015).

The fact that digital technology platforms can help adolescents to develop new relationships is especially meaningful for those in relatively conservative cultural contexts, such as in Afghanistan, where family members generally restrict youth from having private connections with friends, especially with those of the opposite sex (Hossaini, 2018). Another example is in Bangladesh where opposite-sex friendships are not encouraged, where dating is not generally acceptable, and wherein adolescents find social media a major and sometimes the only way for them to develop romantic relationships (Huq et al., 2021).

In the face of the opportunities that digital technology has provided adolescents for social relationships, technology can also have negative impacts on their social experiences, such as through enacting negative social comparisons, increasing their sense of loneliness, and providing opportunities for cyberbullying, negative dating experiences, and harassment and abuse. Negative social comparisons that may negatively impact mental health have been observed among Chinese adolescents in their use of Qzone — a popular social media site in China (Niu et al., 2018), and among adolescents in Chile and El Salvador in their use of social networking sites (Beltrán et al., 2019). Social media use intensity has also been related to social comparisons and envy among adolescents in Thailand (Charoensukmongkol, 2018).

Online experiences may contribute to adolescents' loneliness under certain circumstances. A study among Austrian adolescents found that Internet use intensity is related to loneliness when communication quality about Internet with parents is low (Appel et al., 2012). More recently, a study during the COVID-19 pandemic among Peruvian adolescents found that negative online social experiences such as lack of sense of belonging are related to higher loneliness, though this study also found that positive online social experiences such as feeling valued and receiving advice are related to lower loneliness (Magis-Weinberg et al., 2021).

Further, cyberbullying is common among adolescents. For example, according to a study in Spain, more than half of the adolescent participants have committed cyber-aggression during the last 3 months (Álvarez-García et al., 2018). Another study in Spain among immigrant youth from the Maghreb, Ecuador, and sub-Saharan African has not only identified general cyber-victimization experiences but also experiences specifically perpetuating religion-related stereotypes such as those with xenophobic online content and hate speech (Casado et al., 2019).

With regard to dating developed online, adolescents recognize the related risks including relationships with fake profiles, cheating, sexual harassment, and blackmails by private information and pictures, such as among those in Bangladesh (Huq et al., 2021) and among the immigrant youth in Spain (Casado et al., 2019). Recent research has found that over 30% of adolescents studied in Brazil and Uruguay who

had contact with strangers met the stranger in person (Trucco & Palma, 2020) and that more than half of adolescent participants in a study conducted across four Southeastern Asian countries including Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand have met a stranger from online contacts (UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional office and Center for Justice and Crime Prevention, 2020), which can make them especially vulnerable to sexual harassment and abuse.

Risks in the Digital World

In addition to the negative social experiences discussed above, adolescents around the globe also experience a variety of risks in the digital world. These risks include loss of control of personal and private information, exposure to and creation of explicit and disturbing content, consumption of misinformation and disinformation, and triggers of body image issues and self-harm (Beltrán et al., 2019; Casado et al., 2019; Huq et al., 2021; Manago & Pacheco, 2019; Trucco & Palma, 2020; UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional office and Center for Justice and Crime Prevention, 2020).

In the face of these risks, adolescents develop awareness and coping strategies, which in turn may help them to develop agency. According to the study reviewed above based on qualitative interviews among Bangladeshi adolescents, they are aware of risks online and have developed ways to control and mitigate these risks, such as through blocking, unfriending, and reporting users who sent unwanted harassment messages, filtering friending requests and unwanted messages, identifying fraud and fake accounts, and choosing social media sites that allow safer settings (Huq et al., 2021). Similarly, the adolescent participants in the study conducted in Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay reported differentiating information that they can and cannot share online and identifying correct information, in addition to coping strategies such as blocking and changing privacy settings (Trucco & Palma, 2020). Adolescents from a refugee school in Malaysia also reported awareness of data sharing and privacy issues while using the Internet (UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional office and Center for Justice and Crime Prevention, 2020).

With higher levels of digital literacy and skills than their parents, adolescents may especially develop individuation and separation from parents with the reliance on their own digital coping strategies. The youth in the Southeast Asian study referred above reported that they would block strangers when they send or solicit a photo – an independent coping strategy – but only a few would report the experience to their parents or trusted adults (UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office and Center for Justice and Crime Prevention, 2020). They even use their digital knowledge to help their parents and grandparents with identifying fake content. However, in the meantime, some adolescents in this study believed that parents need to be involved in privacy protection and content monitoring for their younger siblings, which suggests that they still consider parents' help as important beyond their

own risk coping strategies. This is consistent with research findings from among the youth in Chile and Uruguay where half of them reported that they would speak to a parent when they encounter disturbing people or content online (Trucco & Palma, 2020).

In addition to the risks related to the content and information in the digital context, developing problematic use behaviors is also a risk from using digital technology. Research has revealed links from problematic Internet use or smartphone addiction to mental health problems or lower well-being among adolescents in countries including China (Cao et al., 2011), South Korea (Lee et al., 2018), Chile (Donoso et al., 2021), and Spain (Muñoz-Miralles et al., 2016); these risk behaviors may reduce their resources for agency and autonomy development. In addition, problematic digital behaviors and smartphone addictions may also have negative impacts on relationships with parents and family functioning, such as among adolescents from France (Bonnaire & Phan, 2017), Portugal (Carvalho et al., 2017), South Korea (Kim & Kim, 2015), and India (Mahapatra, 2019). Thus, these behaviors may reduce connectedness and increase detachment between adolescents and their parents.

Parental Mediation

In the face of the risks in the digital world, parents try to protect adolescents by adopting a variety of digital parenting strategies. According to the EU Kids Online Survey (Livingstone et al., 2011), parental mediation strategies for youths' use of digital technology can be categorized into active mediation (e.g., communication and co-use), restrictive mediation (e.g., permission and restrictions of use), mediation of Internet safety (e.g., suggestions of safe use), monitoring (e.g., checking content and contacts), and technical mediation (e.g., using parental control software and content filtering). Different strategies may induce different reactions and impact autonomy differently among adolescents. It is likely that active mediation and mediation of Internet safety may better foster adolescents' agency and contribute to connectedness, while adolescents may perceive restrictive mediation and monitoring as intrusive to their privacy, which may deter their agency development or lead to conflicts and detachment. Indeed, a recent study in Bangladesh has found that among these mediation strategies, only active mediation appears to be preventive of adolescents' problematic Internet use (Chandrima et al., 2020). Nonetheless, qualitative analysis among another group of Bangladeshi adolescents and their parents has indicated that in the face of restrictive rules such as time limit, adolescents tend to negotiate a lot with parents (Huq et al., 2021) – a process through which adolescents can also develop their agency and separation.

The type of mediation strategies that parents adopt depends on their own digital literacy and skills. In the abovementioned study conducted across Spain, Latin America (Dominican Republic, Mexico, Chile, Bolivia), and Ireland, findings indicate that when parents have a lack of knowledge about regulating children's Internet

use, they tend to apply restrictive mediation strategies such as limiting access and time of use (Martínez De Morentin et al., 2014). This finding is echoed by studies in Spain among immigrant families and among the youth in Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand), such that with limited digital literacy, parents are likely to set restrictive rules for the youth's technology use (Casado et al., 2019; UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office and Center for Justice and Crime Prevention, 2020). However, these studies also note that, given the digital knowledge gap between parents and adolescents, adolescents can easily bypass parents' restrictions and monitoring, which may actually contribute to their privacy from parents and the de-idealization of parents – processes that facilitate separation. Moreover, conflicts with parents can arise when adolescents try to transgress their parents' rules about using technology, as suggested by a study among Italian adolescents (Borca et al., 2015), potentially contributing to their detachment.

Beyond restrictive mediation strategies, the digital literacy gap between parents and adolescents may also lead to an alternative direction where parents apply little mediation or rules, with adolescents mainly being self-reliant and navigating the digital world by themselves, which can also potentially facilitate their agency and separation. This was the case found in a study among adolescents in Portugal. The majority of adolescents in the study identified themselves as intensive Internet user without parent mediation or rules and navigated the Internet autonomously by themselves (de Almeida et al., 2012).

Family Communication

Digital technology provides channels and opportunities for family communication and parent-adolescent connectedness. Adolescents across many countries report digital platforms, such as the Internet, social media, and digital devices especially mobile phones, are important to their communication and connection with family members, based on studies in Chile and El Salvador (Beltrán et al., 2019), Sweden (Axelsson, 2010), Spain (Casado et al., 2019), and the United Arab Emirates (Badri et al., 2017).

The role of technology in family connectedness can be especially meaningful for transnational, immigrant, and migrant families where family members, including parents and adolescents, are far apart. For example, an ethnographic study among a group of Filipino adults in the United States who mostly are mothers/grandmothers and domestic workers revealed that those separated transnational families had to rely on digital technology (e.g., Facebook, Skype, webcams) to maintain communication, connection, cohesion, and intimacy (Francisco, 2015). Another qualitative study among immigrant Latino families in the United States who are predominantly lower-income and Mexican-heritage highlighted the importance of the Internet, video calls, and social media to their interactions with family in Mexico, facilitating regular communication, virtual intimacy, and emotional support (Gonzalez & Katz, 2016). Further, a quantitative study among migrant workers in China who are parents

of left-behind children found that the mobile phone serves as a fundamental role in their parenting, especially through allowing for instantaneous communication and affection exchanges – dimensions that are strong predictors of their involvement and efficient communication with their left-behind children (Liu & Leung, 2017). These communication and connection opportunities can contribute to adolescents' relationships with parents by facilitating connectedness and prevent detachment among these families.

Conclusions and Future Directions

Technology is fast becoming a staple in almost all facets of life, including in the daily interactions of adolescents with their family and with the world. This chapter highlights the various ways by which technology and digital communication can impact adolescent autonomy development, with the research presented here organized around the four-factor model of adolescent autonomy development. Also examined are a variety of ways in which technology may influence adolescents and their interactions with parents, with implications for each of the autonomy factors, suggesting that digital technology can both support and hinder autonomy and that the broader context is critical in understanding these impacts.

Research on the links between parenting/family, digital technology, and adolescent autonomy around the world is still in its nascent stage. From a global perspective, this content presents examples of studies that are beginning to shed light on this issue. The list of countries in this chapter is not exhaustive. Nonetheless, the review shows that research on adolescents, families, and technology is emerging around the world and that regardless of cultural context, technology influences adolescents' autonomy development in important ways.

For a better understanding of how digital technology influences adolescent autonomy development around the globe, especially in the contexts of non-US countries and among immigrants in the United States, more research is needed. First, many studies reviewed in this chapter are qualitative analysis based on adolescents' and/or parents' perceptions of technology. The exploration of how technology may influence adolescents' autonomy is mainly based on participants' subjective perceptions and/or researchers' extrapolations and discussions. Thus, future directions include more quantitative research that directly measures both digital technology use behaviors and factors of adolescent autonomy and tests their associations. Second, many of the quantitative studies are still descriptive and cross-sectional. Thus, our understanding of long-term impacts of digital technology and causal relations among variables is limited. More longitudinal studies are needed in non-US countries to examine the directionality of the associations between technology use behaviors and autonomy. Third, most of the studies reviewed above were examining the use of Internet, social media, and/or mobile phones. Different devices, content, and functions of digital technology may induce different experiences and have different implications; further, even within the general channel (e.g., social media on

phones), different applications and platforms (e.g., TikTok versus Instagram) may produce different experiences for youth. Future research needs to be more inclusive of various and emergent digital activities and more specific about the activities and platforms of digital technology use among adolescents and their parents. Finally, autonomy development, family relationships, and digital technology use do not occur in a vacuum. Understanding the broader context, including specific cultural aspects of family life, will be critical in understanding the intersections among these important aspects of development among adolescents around the globe.

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Chapter 3

Navigating LGBTIQ+ Identities in Adolescence: Dialogical Tensions of the Self as Embedded in Familial, Cultural, and Societal Contexts



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In order to keep the different and divergent positions in the self together as parts of a contradictory yet coherent whole, a dialogical view on self and identity is desirable so that these positions can learn from each other and stimulate the further development of the self as a sufficiently integrated whole. (Hermans, 2015)

Introduction

Growing up and realizing that one's gender or sexuality diverges from the norm and is stigmatized by a society that says that you do not belong or worse pathologizes, moralizes, and even criminalizes your identity can be a particularly troubling experience. In this chapter, we tell the story of adolescents who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersexed, queer, plus (i.e., LGBTIQ+) and how coming

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to terms with one's sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, and sex characteristics or SOGIESC is a journey of surviving and struggling to live in a *cishetero-normative* world. Applying Hubert Hermans' Dialogical Self Theory (DST) as the primary lens, we see LGBTIQ+ adolescents as navigating their identities across dialogical tensions or the spectrum of voices in society, from accepting to accepting conditionally (or tolerating) to rejecting their queer identities. LGBTIQ+ adolescents navigate the dialogical tensions between the self and the voices of society and others inside the self, alongside navigating their identities inside their families and the external world they live in. The internal process of accepting the LGBTIQ+ self takes place in the context of navigating family rejection or acceptance and societal discrimination or recognition. Hence, identity construction and acceptance for LGBTIQ+ adolescents are shaped by layers of embedded contexts, from the family to broader culture and society.

How does one come to accept the stigmatized self? How does one find agency and voice amidst the many voices that define and confine who one is and can be in one's culture, family, and even self? It is within the framework of a dialogical self that we try to understand LGBTIQ+ adolescents' struggle for self, family, and social acceptance in the context of their family, culture, and society. We present this contextualized understanding of the experience of LGBTIQ+ adolescents from the unique cultural context of the Philippines and the *glocalized* digital world of the youth. We tell the story in four parts:

1. Navigating a *Cisheteronormative* World: Global, Regional, and Local Contexts.
2. Navigating the Spectrum of Voices in *Glocalized* Digital Spaces.
3. Navigating Family Rejection, Tolerance, and Acceptance.
4. Navigating *Glocalized* Constructions of LGBTIQ+ Identities in the Philippines.

Introduction: The Dialogical Self

To understand the navigation of self-acceptance among LGBTIQ+ adolescents as persons of diverse genders and sexualities in contemporary societies, Hermans' Dialogical Self Theory (DST) is most apt. DST conceptualizes the self as a "self" in "dialogue" with its many selves; among them is the voice of internalized society or the voices of others inside the self (Hermans, 2003). Society not only exists outside the self but is interiorized inside the self and becomes part of the self or the "I" (Hermans, 2003). DST facilitates an understanding of the importance of social acceptance to one's self-acceptance. This reality is one that LGBTIQ+ adolescents know too well, particularly when struggling with concerns about "coming out" and navigating acceptance in their families.

The Self as a Multivoiced Self

DST is based on two fundamental concepts, namely, the self and dialogue. When applied to the context of self-acceptance among LGBTIQ+ adolescents, these two concepts represent the reflexive process of self-acceptance as occurring internally (i.e., within the self), as well as a process that exists externally within a society (i.e., in dialogue with others). By bringing these two key concepts together into one concept, the “dialogical self,” society is interiorized into the self, as the self is exteriorized as a society-of-selves (Hermans & Gieser, 2012). The self, and the process of self-acceptance, ceases to exist as separate from society. Rather the self becomes a mini-society, or a society of minds (a term borrowed from Minsky, 1985), in turn making society a society-of-selves. This mutually inclusive relationship of self and society facilitates an understanding of the dynamic multiplicity of I-positions.

Each I-position carries a voice like a character in a story that has its own perspective or position (Hermans, 2003). For instance, a queer adolescent can have multiple I-positions – the I as queer; the I as a son, daughter, or child; the I who is a best friend; the I who is a high school student. They can also carry I-positions of being afraid to tell their parents that they are queer, feeling happy to have other queer friends, or feeling worried that they will not find love as a queer person. These multiple I-positions can be in conflict with each other or can be in agreement. They are in dialogue with one another. For instance, the I-position that is worried and afraid of being queer can be consoled by the I-position that is happy to be queer which can eventually become the dominant voice of the self or the I that is a child can win over the I who is queer and may choose to hide their identity from their parents. An I-position can also emanate from the external world to become part of the I. For instance, the I that has supportive queer friends, the I that has rejecting parents, or the I that is hated by bullies in school can become voices inside the self. Social reality is captured by DST as it shows the dialogical capacity of the I to relate with society inside the self. DST positions the self as a multivoiced self that navigates voices of self-acceptance, rejection, compromise, and conformity, among many other possible positions.

Navigating Dialogical Tensions

An understanding of the self as a dynamic multiplicity of I-positions (Hermans & Gieser, 2012) requires an appreciation that such I-positions are characterized with tensions, particularly for LGBTIQ+ adolescents. For instance, being part of the LGBTIQ+ community and being a member of a conservative Catholic community are a possible source of conflict for LGBTIQ+ adolescents. Growing up lesbian or gay inside a society that criminalizes same-sex relations can likewise create tension

in a gay or lesbian adolescent. In a context where notions of *cisheteronormativity* define social relations with dominance and privilege while intersecting power structures of class and ethnicity, among other equally salient social factors, the LGBTIQ+ adolescent learns to navigate these tensions. This embodiment of the I-positions means navigating a process of positioning, repositioning, and counter-positioning one's sense of self amidst these tensions. The navigation of the I-positions is described as interacting voices within the self, engaged in a process of question and answer, agreement, conflict, negotiation, and integration (Hermans & Gieser, 2012).

For instance, among transgender women, there can be great tensions surrounding acceptance of the self in relation to "harmony with their bodies." This personal sense of harmony may or may not require undergoing sexual replacement surgery or hormone replacement therapy, to achieve that feeling of being synchronized with one's body deemed essential for self-acceptance. The process of achieving this harmony involves a process of question and answer. For many, this could include tensions around the ability to finance replacement surgery or therapy if desired; it may include support for the transition or lack of it by members of the family; it may include religious beliefs, among others. These tensions operate in the mind, as one builds a sense of self love and acceptance.

As one young Filipina transwoman put it, "we need to find that [you know-the] harmony, harmony with our body. And that harmony for some people is a transition of their body and for some (...) is just to accept the body and not really fight with the genitals. Coz otherwise you're also affirming that women are women because of their vagina. So you may not have a vagina, but you can still be a woman because your identity as a female was not defined by the absence or the presence of that vagina" (Isis International, 2010, p. 70).

Clearly, the concept of alterity, that is, the acceptance and respect of the otherness of the other, can be experienced within the I-positions, be they articulated as the voices of others, actual or imagined, or as voices within the self (Cooper & Hermans, 2007). In other words, the self is always in dialogue with the diverse and even conflicting I-positions, and it is helpful to try to accept and respect each voice, including the voice of the self that is "othered" or the "self-as-other." As such, even the LGBTIQ+ self that is perceived by society or other people as the "other" can be accepted and respected by the dialogical self.

According to Hermans and Gieser (2012):

Significant others – real, remembered, anticipated or imaginary – who play a role in one's self temporarily or for a longer period, serve as promoter positions. Significant others, like one's father, mother, other family members, teachers, may exert their long-lasting influence as promoters of one's development (or as anti-promoters, in case they function as an impediment to one's development). (p. 17)

It is interesting to note that Hermans and Gieser (2012) placed the notion of anti-promoters in parentheses, somewhat suggesting this may be the exception rather than the rule. However, for LGBTIQ+ adolescents, particularly in a predominantly traditional Catholic country like the Philippines, this may be the rule rather than the exception. An adolescent growing up in the Philippines will often encounter the

teaching of conservative Catholic values in school and even inside the family. The belief that homosexuality is a sin or that God did not create LGBTIQ+ people is a common discourse an LGBTIQ+ Filipino adolescent will encounter.

Glocalization, Hybridization, and Hybrid Identities

Hermans (2015) has argued for the need to go beyond the conceptualization that globalization and localization are polar opposites or that local cultures and global cultures resist or oppose each other. Hermans (2015) proposed that global cultures incorporate local cultures in a process that can be conceptualized as *glocalization*. Adolescents can develop local identities alongside global identities. It is also possible for adolescents to develop “hybrid identities, which combine elements of both local and global cultures” (Hermans, 2015, p. 18). Global and local elements are not isolated parts of the self but interact or dialogue with each other. In a process of *hybridization*, local and global identities can create new, emergent, or hybrid identities.

Anchoring on Hermans (2015) theorizing of glocalization and hybridization, we understand LGBTIQ+ adolescents as navigating their identities as constructed in their local cultures alongside a global (or globalizing) culture. While they grow up with the localized meanings of their gender and sexuality, they are also exposed to globalized meanings of their SOGIESC as facilitated by globalization and the Internet. For example, a Filipino transman adolescent may grow up with the terms *bakla* (feminine gay) and *tomboy* (masculine lesbian) in his community and may initially identify as tomboy given his masculine expression and identity of being a boy. Becoming aware of transgender men communities online, he may later reconstruct his identity to being a transgender man. For Filipino adolescents at present, local and global meanings of SOGIESC are more accessible allowing for a transman adolescent to identify as transgender early in life.

Navigating a Cisheteronormative World: Global, Regional, and Local Contexts

Identity development or construction is a key developmental task during adolescence. It is defined as a process of developing an identity or “sense of self” – a set of characteristics that are seen as belonging to the self and has a “sense of continuity” through time (American Psychological Association, n.d.-c). LGBTIQ+ adolescents navigate the process of identity construction amidst long-standing social structures and ideational forces that continue to dominate the notion of heterosexuality as normative. Also referred to as *heteronormativity*, this concept generally refers to “the assumption that heterosexuality is the standard for defining normal

sexual behavior and that male–female differences and gender roles are the natural and immutable essentials in normal human relations. According to some social theorists, this assumption is fundamentally embedded in, and legitimizes, social and legal institutions that devalue, marginalize, and discriminate against people who deviate from its normative principle” (American Psychological Association, [n.d.-b](#)).

Coexisting alongside heteronormativity is *cisgender privilege*, which generally refers to the privileging of cisgender persons, that is, persons “having or relating to a gender identity that corresponds to the culturally determined gender roles for one’s birth sex” (American Psychological Association, [n.d.-a](#)). This *cisheteronormative* privileged context perpetuates the stigmatization of diverse genders and sexualities beyond cisgender and heterosexual identities, where among those most affected by these exclusionary social structures and practices are LGBTIQ+ people. LGBTIQ+ adolescents engage in constructing their identities or sense of self amidst this wider context of social stigma and exclusion. Hence, the process of identity construction is made more challenging for LGBTIQ+ adolescents, exposing them to increased mental health risks (Russell & Fish, 2016). Meyer’s minority stress theory has been the dominant framework to explain how experiences of prejudice and discrimination significantly affect the mental health and well-being of gender and sexual minorities (Meyer, 2003). Furthermore, this social stigma and prejudice can be internalized by the LGBTIQ+ adolescent self.

Southeast Asian Context

For many countries in this region, societal discrimination of LGBTIQ+ people is deeply rooted in the histories of Western colonization. A colonial presence remains ingrained in the legal institutions and cultural practices of postcolonial societies. For instance, Brunei, Malaysia, and Singapore maintain the existence of an anti-sodomy law, inherited from British colonization. Presently, there are no national laws on the protection from discrimination based on SOGIE or the provision of equal rights for LGBTIQ+ people in any of the countries in the Southeast Asian region. Across all Southeast Asian countries, transgender persons are reported as among the most vulnerable to stigma, exclusion, and violence (ASEAN SOGIE Caucus, 2017).

In the Asian context, studies on homonegativity reveal great rejection against lesbian women and gay men in the Southeast Asian context: the highest in Indonesia followed by Malaysia and the lowest, yet still revealing rejecting attitudes, in the Philippines (Manalastas et al., 2017). From this, we could surmise that Asian societies with predominantly conservative Islamic practices enforcing their interpretations of the Shariah law constitute the high rejection of LGBTIQ+ identities, whereas the more neutral and Christian settings such as the case of Thailand and the Philippines constitute the more tolerant attitudes toward the LGBTIQ+ community (Felix, 2018; Robinson, 2017). It should be noted as well that across these countries, there are

no gender recognition laws and only varying degrees of antidiscrimination policies to totally no protection from discrimination on the basis of SOGIESC. Homonegativity results from the cisheteronormative and deeply patriarchal culture as well as colonial imperialist policies entrenched in these countries. In addition, the medicolegal frameworks and gatekeeping on sexual and gender identities are exacerbated in these contexts with the historic pathologization of homosexuality and transgenderism using psychiatric models such as the DSM that once viewed homosexuality as a mental illness alongside gender identity disorder or GID (Alegre, 2018; Manalastas et al., 2017; Yeo & Chu, 2017). Despite the shift from GID to gender dysphoria, the psychological distress that comes from gender incongruence between one's assigned sex at birth and one's gender identity (American Psychiatric Association, n.d.), medical models continue to be used as a form of gatekeeping as societies still view queer people as abnormal, consequently instilling dialogical dissonance among queer adolescents as they struggle to come to terms with their identities (Alegre, 2018; Manalastas et al., 2017; Yeo & Chu, 2017).

Philippine Context

In the case of the Philippines, Tan et al. (2001) describe the dominant conception of homosexuality as both sin and sickness: sin from Roman Catholicism inherited from Spanish colonization and sickness from the medical model from American colonization. Tan and colleagues explored young Filipinos' views on the themes of sex, gender, and love, where homosexuality was identified as a congenital anomaly or a sickness that is inborn. The general themes of "natural" and "unnatural" and "normal" and "abnormal" emerged, as influenced by religious beliefs.

Although LGBTIQ+ people seem very visible and recognized in the Philippines, there is no gender recognition, same-sex union, or antidiscrimination law in this predominantly Christian country. Whereas proposals for a gender recognition law are still being discussed within LGBTIQ+ communities, the proposed equality or same-sex union bill was rejected by Philippine lawmakers, many of whom have a Christian background, are devout Catholics, or are Christian fundamentalists (Cartagenas, 2010). A public opinion survey on same-sex unions in 2019 failed to garner support and yielded a message of how this proposed law gravely opposed Christian doctrine (Wakefield, 2019). When news broke out in October 2020 that Pope Francis expressed support for same-sex civil unions, there were negative reactions including those bordering on anger and hatred from some Filipinos as seen in various social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (CNA, 2020; Yumol, 2020). Many Filipinos expressed with indignation and vindictiveness that same-sex union is a sin, immoral, and unacceptable. Similarly, changing sex and cross-gender identification is also viewed as a sin and immoral (Manalastas & Del Pillar, 2005). It is evident that Philippine society is generally conservative and is highly influenced by Christian values and beliefs (dela Torre, 2019).

Law and State-Endorsed Discrimination

Though being LGBTIQ+ is not a crime in the Philippines, there is no national law that legally recognizes the existence of LGBTIQ+ people. There are also no national laws that extend equal rights and afford protection to LGBTIQ+ people. Legal recognition, for instance, in the case of transgender and intersexed persons, is a fundamental right that is not readily accessible. There are two high profile cases that were ruled upon by the Supreme Court of the Philippines that illustrate this legal tension, namely, the case of Jennifer Cagandahan and the case of Mely Silverio. In the case of Cagandahan, the Supreme Court allowed the change of sex and name on their birth certificate on a medical basis, that is, recognizing their congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH) condition, seen as *natural* (UNDP, Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines, 2018). In the case of Silverio, on the other hand, the Supreme Court did not allow the request for a change of sex and name, with the reasoning that the categories of male and female did not include those who had undergone sexual reassignment surgery, seen as *unnatural* (UNDP, Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines, 2018). Despite the numerous bills filed in Congress in the past two decades, the passage of the SOGIE Equality Bill that seeks to protect the LGBTIQ+ community from discrimination remains pending (De Vela, 2017; Gamalinda, 2021).

Religion and Religious-Based Discrimination

The Catholic Church or hierarchy is seen as the primary moral authority in Philippine society (Marin, 1995). The Philippines is home to Asia's largest Catholic population, almost the same as the United States, and is the third largest in the world after Brazil and Mexico (Pew Research Center, 2013). With 81% identifying as Catholic or 93% identifying as Christian (Catholic, Protestant, Born-Again, and other Christian denominations), the Philippines is a predominantly Catholic country (Pew Research Center, 2011). The Catholic hierarchy is deemed as having the power to instill notions of right and wrong, good and bad, among Filipinos (Montemayor & Silverio, 1999) and Filipino families across socioeconomic classes. Aside from citing scriptures that condemn LGBTIQ+ people in homilies during Sunday masses, the Church hierarchy has also been steadfast in opposing national policies and legislative efforts to promote and protect the acceptance of LGBTIQ+ persons. This was most apparent during the preparations for the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994, where there was a massive mobilization of Catholics to condemn the redefinition of the family to include and recognize families formed within homosexual unions (Marin, 1995). More recently and equally notable are the interventions of the Catholic hierarchy in its unwavering opposition against the passage of the SOGIE Equality Bill, since its first filing in Congress in 2001 up to the present (De Vela, 2017).

This continued prevalence and privilege of cisheteronormativity in the structures and practices of legal and religious institutions are reflected and modeled in family structures and practices. It is not uncommon for LGBTIQ+ adolescents to experience negative and discriminatory socialization from their families. LGBTIQ+ persons have reported experiences of being neglected, disowned, ridiculed, and abused by members of their own families. They have reported receiving physical, verbal, and emotional punishment from parents and relatives who refuse to accept them (Paguntalan, 2002; USAID & UNDP, 2014).

Navigating Tensions as LGBTIQ+ and Catholic

In a collection of first-person narratives, “*Buhay Bahaghari: The Filipino LGBT Chronicles*” (Callueng, 2014), LGBT Filipinos share their stories, including stories of growing up Catholic. Argel Tuason shares being *Katolikong beki* (Catholic gay) and tells his story of growing up with a very negative view of sex and more so of gay sex. He outlines how sex is a sin and that sex between two men is double the sin. He narrates how the Catholic Church made him see being gay as sinfulness, “isa akong malaking kasalanan” (I am a big sin) (p. 129). He questions the motto “Love the Sinner. Hate the Sin.” and asks why being gay automatically makes one a sinner. While he strongly identified as a Catholic, he eventually decided to leave the Catholic community to undergo a process of unlearning the internalized homophobia he inherited from the Church. He continues to pray to God for gay Catholics who “lost their place in the church, rejected because of their sexuality... displaced, banished, rejected, despised” to find affirmation from the Catholic community (p. 131). Argel Tuason eventually founded Rainbow Catholics Philippines, a community that brings pastoral care and justice to LGBTIQ+ Catholics and their families.

The Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) is an LGBT-affirmative Christian Church that has congregations around the world. Through *kwentuhan* (storytelling) sessions, Evangelista, Dumaop, and Nelson (2016) listened to the stories of lesbian and gay members of MCC in Quezon City. They saw a shared narrative that began with experiences of oppression from religious teachings and institutions and being ostracized for their sexuality in their church and even in their families. Some were asked by their families to leave the church or to renounce their being gay. Some were forced to hide their sexuality or separate their faith and their sexuality. Eventually, they searched for a faith community where they could be fully accepted, and that was when they found MCC, an example of a Christian community that provides a safe space for LGBT Christians. In this LGBT-affirming church, they found a way to integrate their sexual and religious identities. One shared feeling blessed and loved knowing that God accepts and loves LGBT people like them. Another shared that what MCC stands for is that “who you are, is not a sin... we uphold love. God did not make a mistake when He created us.” (p. 119). In a safe and affirming environment, LGBT Christians found a way to integrate their sexuality and their faith in their own personal journey.

Navigating the Spectrum of Voices in *Glocalized* Digital Spaces

Adolescence is the age when the desire to sculpt out one's individuality comes to the forefront of a person's psyche. This process is often mediated by a person's family, friends, society, religion, and the media they consume. For LGBTIQ+ adolescents, this is no different: these all serve as starting points of and spaces for dialogue and negotiation. To this end, the rise of modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the increase in positive LGBTIQ+ representations in media have contributed greatly to the resiliency of LGBTIQ+ youth (Craig et al., 2015).

Media – both in its traditional and digital forms – has been cited as “the primary site of production for social knowledge [concerning] LGBT[I]Q[+] identities” (Gray, 2009, p. 1165), as these various media forms “circulate the social grammar, appearance, and sites of [LGBTIQ+] -ness.” Indeed, the past few years alone have seen a rapid increase in depictions of LGBTIQ+ individuals across these platforms (Insider, 2021; McInroy & Craig, 2016). While this increased visibility and widespread affirmation of the LGBTIQ+ community is a generally good development, harmful stereotypes and difficulties for content creators continue to persist (McInroy & Craig, 2016). The availability and quality of LGBTIQ+ content in traditional media, particularly television media, is shaped by wider social, economic, political, and cultural forces. For example, the criminalization of homosexuality severely limits what scenes, films, or series can be broadcasted in certain countries (Insider, 2021). Even in more liberal or progressive countries, networks can be forced to censor content deemed “unacceptable” or “immoral” or non-child-friendly and taboo.

These sociocultural tensions extend to the family, which becomes a site where “coming out” narratives take place, and LGBTIQ+ adolescents are forced to grapple with and live through the tension caused by the uncertainty of three possible endings: acceptance, conditional acceptance (tolerance), or rejection.

We discuss how LGBTIQ+ adolescents navigate these complex tensions in society, in their respective families, and in themselves. What do these broader societal tensions look like? How do these shape families and their relationships with LGBTIQ+ adolescents? How, then, do LGBTIQ+ adolescents grapple with and navigate through these tensions as subjects, objects, and participants in these multi-faceted dialogues?

Inclusionary Voices

Recent years have seen an increase in representations of LGBTIQ+ identities in media, especially in Western countries. With increased access to global media, LGBTIQ+ youth in the Philippines now have greater exposure to LGBTIQ+ representations from other countries in a globalized context beyond local representations. BBC's *Doctor Who* (2005) and *Torchwood* (2006) and CBS' *Star Trek: Discovery*

(2017), for example, feature bisexual/pansexual and gay characters in prominent, leading roles. Additionally, Western animation has featured multiple LGBTIQ+ characters in the advent of online streaming – some openly having healthy queer relationships – such as *The Legend of Korra* (2012) and *Kipo and the Age of Wonderbeasts* (2020).

Asian media also contain examples of queer representation. Japanese manga and anime have been open in its depictions of queerness, with recent titles including *Yuri on Ice* (2016), *Given* (manga: 2013; anime: 2019), and *The Stranger by the Beach* (manga: 2013; movie: 2020). Similarly, Thailand's boys' love dramas have gained popularity in the Philippines in 2020, such as *2gether* (2020) (Carreon, 2020). Similarly, 2020 has been a prolific year for queer representation in Philippine media. The year saw the release of several web series centered on gay characters such as *Gaya sa Pelikula*, *Hello Stranger*, and *Gameboys*. These series centered on the experiences of gay couples of differing age groups and tackle some of the issues that LGBTIQ+ people may face.

Representations in media are important as these provide LGBTIQ+ youth with a view of what is possible. Positive media representations have been linked to greater resilience among LGBTIQ+ youth (Craig et al., 2015). Having these positive models for LGBTIQ+ people and the lives LGBTIQ+ people can have is important in the identity formation of queer adolescents. *Torchwood* and *Legend of Korra*, for example, provide examples of strong, queer characters in leadership positions in the form of Captain Jack Harkness and Korra. On the other hand, *Yuri on Ice* provides an example of softer forms of queerness and queer expression shed in a positive light in the form of *Yuuri Katsuki*. Meanwhile, series such as *Gaya sa Pelikula*, *Hello Stranger*, *Given*, and *Gameboys* highlight some of the key issues concerning the LGBTIQ+ community while presenting possible images of what LGBTIQ+ relationships could look like.

Exclusionary Voices

Digital media and digital spaces have been seen as a more inclusive alternative to traditional media. The participative nature of digital media and the lack of strict broadcasting guidelines allow for greater diversity in storylines and representations of LGBTIQ+ individuals (McInroy & Craig, 2016). However, even digital platforms are not entirely safe from *cisheteronormativity* (Cockayne & Richardson, 2019). The Internet, despite often being conceptualized as a monolithic, unified network, is more accurately a series of multiple intersecting networks that have their own norms, social rules, and interests. The availability and accessibility of inclusive spaces and media are still very much dependent on corporate interests and state-specific legal guidelines that affect traditional media.

Western media, particularly animation in the United States, has had a history of producing content which either excludes LGBTIQ+ identities or perpetuates harmful stereotypes (Insider, 2021). Openly queer or queer-coded characters are casted

as villains, ridiculed for comedic purposes, or even violently attacked. While this may be seen as a form of representation in the broadest sense, as animator and producer Rebecca Sugar puts it, “if you can only exist as a villain or a joke, that’s a really heavy thing to be saturated with as a kid” (Insider, 2021).

On the other hand, in various parts of Asia, homosexuality is outright criminalized by law. Various states cite cultural and religious reasons for criminalizing the “practice” of homosexuality (ILGA, 2020; Tan, 2019; Yarcia et al., 2019). The People’s Republic of China recently banned the depiction and representation of “sissy men” or effeminate men in all media (McDonald, 2021). Even supposedly more tolerant or accepting countries have their share of discrimination against the LGBTIQ+ community. For instance, Japanese officials have been quoted as stating that “LGBT goes against the preservation of the species” (Doi & Knight, 2021). This is despite the country’s open representation of queer characters and same-sex relationships in several media over the past decades.

Meanwhile, in the Philippines, conservative Christian groups have been vocal about their stance on SOGIE Equality and the LGBTIQ+ community. The use of the term “gender ideology” when referring to anything that affirms LGBTIQ+ identities has entered the local lexicon as seen in the 2019 senate hearings on the SOGIE Equality Bill (Gamalinda, 2021). Such groups warn against what they construct as a “gender ideology” that is foreign and harmful to children and the family. The spread of such harmful rhetorical devices across continents marks the darker side of ICTs in a globalized world.

Conditional Inclusionary (Tolerant) Voices

Beyond the more explicitly visible stances regarding LGBTIQ+ identities, there exist inclusionary voices that are rooted in certain conditions. Such stances are evident in the Philippine context and often remain unquestioned by even the most ardent observers. An example is a statement delivered by a representative of a Catholic organization during the televised and livestreamed 2019 senate hearings of the SOGIE Equality or Antidiscrimination Bill:

The Catholic Church embraces all – whatever is their orientation, or gender identity... [But] sometimes, the gays have problems because of unacceptable behaviors... [If] they behave decently according to accepted norms in society, they don’t have problems being like everyone else. (ABS-CBN, 2019)

While claiming to come from a place of acceptance of LGBTIQ+ individuals, the statement endorses conditional acceptance – that queer people should stop certain “unacceptable behaviors” and become “like everyone else” for them to be acceptable. There are many similar public statements and opinions rooted in discourses that view LGBTIQ+ identities as a “wrong” lifestyle choice or as a “sinful” practice. When these messages are broadcasted in media, there can be great harm done on the psyche of LGBTIQ+ adolescents. These may fuel long-standing homophobia,

biphobia, and transphobia within communities and families or even suggest the use of conversion therapy – a harmful practice that has long been disavowed by many psychological associations and the United Nations (APA, 2009; UNOHCHR, 2020).

Navigating LGBTIQ+ Identities in Digital Spaces

The advent of ICTs has allowed for the rapid exchange of information and the creation of digital spaces that are not bound by geospatial boundaries. Social media and online streaming platforms have been particularly instrumental in these endeavors. Studies have found that the Internet can provide LGBTIQ+ adolescents the space to cope with minority stress (Austin et al., 2020). Additionally, the ability to create one's own online persona allows LGBTIQ+ youth to explore their sexualities despite any stigmatization they may face in their families or communities (Craig & McNroy, 2014; Jenzen, 2017). For example, the widespread popularity of Korean pop (K-pop) music has become a vehicle for the exploration of queerness among LGBTIQ+ teens (Kuo et al., 2020). This is due, in part, to the varied constructions of masculinities and femininities presented by the music genre when contrasted with their Western counterparts. Similarly, the “furry” community (wherein individuals identify with anthropomorphic or zoomorphic “fursonas”) is another space where LGBTIQ+ youth have been able to safely express themselves due to the anonymity and general openness brought about by the community (Heinz, 2020). Online dating apps have been used in a similar manner, as in the case of Grindr, which has been used by Filipino gay men to connect with other members of the community, explore one's identity, and share their stories online (Castañeda, 2015).

In addition to connecting with other members of the community, ICTs also allow LGBTIQ+ youth to both actively share their stories online and listen to the stories of others. “Coming out” videos have become widespread in online video platforms such as YouTube, and various content creators have done so to provide visibility to the LGBTIQ+ community, be “true to themselves,” and as a way of connecting with viewers (Wei, 2021). Also highlighted in these videos is the perceived importance of familial acceptance in the coming out narrative, where such videos also capture the acceptance of parental figures. Wei (2021), however, points out that cases of coming out that lead to rejection tend to not be recorded or shared online and that the coming out process can be a long battle that includes troubled kinship negotiations with family members with no certainty of success. As such, while these videos may be a source of comfort, these can also present an unrealistic narrative that could lead to disappointment or distress should difficulties arise. A coming out video by YouTuber Scott Major expresses these difficulties, wherein he shares his mother's initial rejection of his sexual orientation, the gradual negotiations and repeated coming out attempts, and the eventual acceptance of his identity (Dangthatsalongname, 2018). He also expressed the reality that coming out is not always safe, nor does it always end in acceptance – citing incidents of people being kicked out or disowned by their families following such disclosures.

Navigating Family Rejection, Tolerance, and Acceptance

In a special issue on LGBT youth lives in context, Horn, Kosciw, and Russell (2009) acknowledged the growing literature on LGBT youth in the past three decades while critiquing its focus on risks, challenges, and victimization. They argued for a shift from a viewing of LGBT youth as at-risk and deficient to seeing them as thriving and resilient. They argued for the need to shift attention to the social contexts that shape the lives of LGBT youth, their health, and adjustment. They proposed a research paradigm that “focuses on understanding the ways in which LGBT youth negotiate their development within various social contexts” (p. 863). Such a paradigm seeks to understand how LGBT youth construct their identities and experiences in relation to the social contexts they are engaged in and how these contexts shape their development. A notable gap in the literature is the context of the family of LGBT youth compared to the “extensive literature on parenting and parent-adolescent relationships” (p. 864).

Horn, Kosciw, and Russell (2009) cite the work of Rosario, Schrimshaw, and Hunter (2009) and Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, and Sanchez (2009) as key literature highlighting the role of family acceptance and rejection on the well-being and health of LGBT youth. They argue for the need to “understand not only parental rejection—and acceptance—but the subtleties of family life that are distinctive in the lives of LGBT youth and that are linked to adjustment over time” (p. 864). In addition, beyond the early coming out models, they highlight the gap in understanding the developmental trajectories of LGBT youth during adolescence. Horn and colleagues (2009) also identified religion as an important socializing context that has a complex relationship with LGBT youth given that most religions see same-sex relations as unnatural and sinful. Living in a religious family or community may have adverse effects on LGBT youth’s mental health, while belonging to a supportive or accepting religious organization may provide affirmation for one’s identity. Very little is known as to how LGBT youth negotiate their identities in the context of family and religion.

Family Acceptance Shapes LGBT Adolescent Health Outcomes

A pioneering work on understanding the role of family acceptance on the health of LGBT adolescents and young adults is the Family Acceptance Project spearheaded by Caitlyn Ryan at San Francisco State University. Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, and Sanchez (2010) found that “family acceptance in adolescence is associated with young adult positive health outcomes (self-esteem, social support, and general health) and is protective for negative health outcomes (depression, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation and attempts)” (p. 210). Unique to this study is how family acceptance is measured in terms of a list of family experiences such as comments, behaviors, and interactions that show acceptance and support for an LGBT

adolescent's identity. Examples of family interactions include how parents, caregivers, and guardians talk openly about sexual orientation, invite one's openly LGBT friends to family gatherings, or appreciate one's hairstyle or clothing even if not typical of one's gender. Ryan and colleagues (2010) highlight the dramatic protective influence of specific family acceptance behaviors to the health and identity of LGBT youth. They conclude that understanding family acceptance in everyday behaviors and developing programs to support families of LGBT children and adolescents are critical given that positive parent-adolescent relationships are the foundation of optimal development.

Family acceptance is important as it predicts greater self-esteem, social support, and overall growth and well-being among LGBT youth and protects against psychological stressors (Ryan et al., 2010). Caitlin Ryan and her team cited the importance of identifying literature that highlights acceptance in the family among LGBTIQ+ adolescents. Despite the lack of literature on family support, it should be noted that LGBTIQ+ adolescents are very vulnerable physically and psychologically and are at-risk especially due to minority stress (Cochran et al., 2003; D'Augelli, 2002; Meyer, 2003; Russell & Joyner, 2001). In the context of societal stigma and discrimination, the role of parents and families in protecting their children from harm is of critical importance (Russell, 2019). However, parents and families may fail to provide the support and acceptance that LGBTIQ+ adolescents need to face and confront cisheteronormativity in their schools and communities. It is unfortunate that parents, family members, and families can be the very source of stigma and discrimination and be the voice of rejection and condemnation.

Family Acceptance Shapes LGB Youth Self-Acceptance

Shilo and Savaya (2011) looked at the effects of perceived social support and acceptance from family and friends to the mental health of LGB youth. They found that compared to support and acceptance from friends, family acceptance and support had the strongest effect on LGB youth's self-acceptance of their sexual orientation. Acceptance and support from friends had the strongest effect on disclosure of one's sexual orientation. This may mean that family acceptance plays a stronger role in the internal process of accepting the self while support from friends shapes more the external process of coming out. Family support also had the strongest effect on LGB youth's mental health in terms of well-being or distress, showing that family interactions do have a significant impact on the emotional well-being of LGB youth.

Family Acceptance Shapes Adjustment of LGBT Young Adults

Snapp, Watson, Russell, Diaz, and Ryan (2015) also showed that family acceptance is the strongest predictor of overall adjustment of LGBT young adults even after accounting for support from friends (e.g., friends knowing about their SOGIE) and community (e.g., attending LGBT events). Family acceptance influenced LGBT

youth's life situation, LGBT esteem, and self-esteem. Family support during adolescence was the only form of support that predicted adjustment as LGBT young adults.

Family Support Shapes LGBT Adolescent Development

McConnell, Birkett, and Mustanski (2016) studied social support and mental health outcomes of LGBT youth longitudinally. They compared the developmental trajectories of LGBT youth across three groups: consistent low family support, consistent high family support, and nonfamily support (support from friends and significant others but low family support). Their results showed that LGBT youth from the low family support and the nonfamily support groups had significantly higher distress compared to those from the high family support group. Despite the presence of high support from friends and significant others, the lack of family support had adverse effects on mental health outcomes of LGBT youth from adolescence to young adulthood. An interesting finding is how family support can change through time. Families may become less rejecting or more accepting over time showing that LGBT youth may receive the support from family they lacked early on in adolescence over time.

Navigating Acceptance of LGBTIQ+ Identities Inside Families

Dialogical Self Theory describes the spatial and temporal process of positioning whether this is localized to the “self” or as the “I” (Hermans, 2004). In his Cartesian view of space and time, one concept he proposes is that the “I” navigates and negotiates in its distributed spatial world as a dynamic multiplicity of positions (Hermans, 2004). Part of this multiplicity of positions is dialogical tensions that can invariably be negotiated by LGBTIQ+ adolescents within the family. Each kind of society also navigates these dialogical tensions variably depending on their sociocultural, anthropological, and geopolitical realities as well as histories. The Philippines may be in Asia, but not all Asian particularly Southeast Asian societies reflect similar dialogical tensions, consequently shaping the tensions that LGBTIQ+ adolescents negotiate within the family and wider society. The Philippines shares similarities with Latin American contexts because of shared postcolonial realities as post-Hispanic and post-American geopolitical spaces, as well as because of their shared Christianized experiences. It is said that Filipino Americans are the “Latinos of Asia” and that Filipinos and Latinos have many cultural similarities including a shared history of Spanish colonization, family values, and Catholicism (Ocampo, 2016). This makes the Philippines closer to Latin American societies compared to its closest geographic neighbors like Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Thailand. For instance, religious pathologization of LGBTIQ+ identities is rooted in Catholicism.

One important cultural dimension that the Philippines shares with Latin American countries is its strong orientation to the family. Referred to as *familismo*, this Latinx cultural value places greater importance to the family over its individual members, prioritizes keeping the family together, and emphasizes familial duty and obligation (Abreu et al., 2020). This strong sense of familism or family-orientedness is strongly observed in the Philippines. According to renowned Filipino anthropologist F. Landa Jocano, “The family is basic to the life of Filipinos. It is the center of their universe.” (1998, p. 11). The Philippines is regarded as a collectivist culture with a strong commitment to the family and the extended family (Hofstede, 1980). “Children are raised to fulfill their familial duty, to self-sacrifice for the family, and to obey parental authority.” (Macapagal et al., 2013, p. 37). Another shared cultural dimension is the role of faith, religion, and spirituality coming from a shared history of Spanish colonization through Roman Catholicism (Ocampo, 2016).

We can draw from the experiences of Latinx fathers and their process of acceptance of their sexual minority children that families also navigate through the dialogical tensions just as LGBTIQ+ children navigate across the spectrum of voices that accept and reject LGBTIQ+ identities. In a study by Abreu et al. (2020), Latinx fathers shared how cultural values could facilitate or hinder acceptance. With strong familism, fathers came to accept their sexual minority children, claiming that their sons and daughters are still their sons and daughters regardless of their sexual identities. On the other hand, with *machismo* or the high value of masculinity and the observance of traditional gender norms, fathers struggled with diverse gender presentations and sought to keep their children from being too “flamboyant” or “loud” or “effeminate” and wished for them to be discrete. What is critical to highlight is how family members, in this case, Latinx fathers, navigate their own acceptance process and how this is shaped by wider cultural values such as the strong attachment to the family. These fathers showed that their love for their children prevailed over cultural prescriptions about gender and sexuality.

In a study of coming out stories of Waray gay adolescents (Waray referring to communities from Leyte and Samar, Eastern Visayas region, Philippines), Docena (2013) found that coming out was not about the actual disclosure of one’s sexual identity to one’s parents but more of managing their identities with their families. Interestingly, none of the Waray gay adolescents disclosed their identity on the belief that their parents already knew they were gay and out of fear that they will be rejected. Some also felt accepted already by their parents because they interpreted the lack of physical punishment for being gay as acceptance. And yet they also report that their parents would make jokes and comments about being gay and that they knew their parents still hoped that they would be straight. Despite not receiving overt support for their sexual identity, these adolescents were already grateful that their parents did not reject them. Thus, there appears to be a shared belief that parental acceptance has to be “earned” and that parents accept them not because they are worthy but because they “compensate” for their sexual identity through their achievements in school and the fulfillment of their responsibilities as children. Central therefore to their experience was maintaining their positive sexual identity

alongside protecting “their family from the potential ‘disturbance’ that might result from coming out” (p. 93).

To further the example, Filipino LGBTIQ+ adolescents may navigate the dialogical tensions as “I as a son/daughter/child who must follow family principles” or “I as embracing my authentic queer self to whatever results in my family” or “I as compartmentalizing – showing and negotiating what pleases my family and secretly or discretely fulfilling my journey.” In these examples of navigation, the outcomes could be a rejecting family (fully or partially), a tolerant family, or an accepting family. As affirmation and acceptance of LGBTIQ+ identities are associated with positive adjustment and greater well-being (Ryan et al., 2009), LGBTIQ+ adolescents try to find their agentic voice as they navigate tensions. Some may choose to move away from home and family, such as being exchange students, to express their authentic queer self without disrupting family relations, and some may choose to reveal their true identities to their families no matter what the outcome, while others may express their identities discretely and separate their queer lives from their families. For example, Filipino transgender adolescents may disregard medical supervision in transitioning and the lack of approval from family to follow their desires with the support of the transgender community, as they perceive that happiness can only be derived from being true to one’s self (Alegre, 2018).

Navigating *Glocalized* Constructions of LGBTIQ+ Identities in the Philippines

LGBTIQ+ adolescents navigate a *cisheteronormative* world experienced through their own unique social and cultural contexts. The spectrum of voices in societies, from inclusionary to exclusionary, shapes the spectrum of voices in families, from accepting to rejecting LGBTIQ+ identities. From the vantage point of Filipino LGBTIQ+ adolescents, we see how dialogical tensions are shaped by social structures such as legal and religious institutions that construct the meaning of LGBTIQ+ identities. For instance, the lack of legal recognition or protection of LGBTIQ+ identities and the dominant Catholic discourse of sinfulness and immorality of LGBTIQ+ identities are part of the representation of *cisheteronormativity* in the Philippines and part of what constitutes the dialogical tensions that Filipino LGBTIQ+ adolescents confront. In addition, social construction of gender and sexuality in a *glocalized* world combines Western or globalizing constructions alongside Filipino or localized constructions of gender and sexuality.

The very construction or meaning of LGBTIQ+ identities is put into question as the term lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, plus is acknowledged as originating from Western cultures, that is, North American and European. The reference to the American Psychological Association or APA to define LGBTIQ+ identities is a prime example. Sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics are seen as distinct and separate constructs as experienced by

individuals. For non-Western cultures like the Philippines, globalized and localized constructions coexist to create *glocalized* constructions of what it means to be of diverse genders and sexualities (beyond cisgender and heterosexual). As such, Filipino adolescents with diverse genders and sexualities construct their identities in this *glocalized* context where LGBTIQ+ identities coexist with *bakla* and *tomboy*, among many other localized constructions for diverse gender and sexual identities.

In the following section, we provide a summary of local LGBTIQ+ identities in the Philippines and the uniqueness of local constructions of gender and sexuality (especially pre-globalization or pre-Internet) vis-à-vis Western constructions of SOGIESC. These localized identities are shown as intersecting with class as the more salient identity (compared to race) in a low-income country like the Philippines. Particular attention is then given to tracing the transgender experience through time given the lack of a local lexicon for transgender identities before *transpinay* (Filipina transgender woman) and *transpinoy* (Filipino transgender man) came to be. The section culminates with examples of how local, global, and glocalized constructions of LGBTIQ+ identities are negotiated, e.g., lesbian vs. *tomboy*, *bakla* vs. gay, and how dialogical tensions are navigated in the context of glocalized identities.

Filipino Localized Identities: Lesbian, Gay, Bakla, Tomboy

During the pre-Internet and pre-globalization era in the 1980s and 1990s, the identities most available to Filipino LGBTIQ+ communities were *tomboy* and *bakla* alongside lesbian and gay (Tan, 1995, 1998; Josef, 1997, 1999). LGBT was not a common acronym, and bisexual and transgender identities were not as visible compared to lesbian and gay identities. Gay/bakla identities cut across gender role expression from a spectrum of masculinities to femininity: “lalaking-lalake (real men), lalake (men), bahid/pa-men (straight-acting/discrete), silahista (bisexual), bading/bakla (gay), pa-girl (like a girl)” (HAIN, 2013, pp. 13–14). Lesbians were likewise categorized according to gender roles (butch/femme): the tomboys (butch lesbians) or “mainstream lesbians” and the politicized “women-loving women” or “feminist lesbians” (Josef, 1997, 1999).

The social construction of gender and sexuality in the Philippines appears to be conflated (Ofreño, 2003; Tan, 1995). Unlike Western constructions that clearly delineate between gender and sexuality, the local construction of *tomboy* to refer to masculine lesbian women and *bakla* to refer to feminine gay men fuses gender and sexuality (Ofreño, 2003; Tan, 1995). There are no local words equivalent to homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual or even to refer to sexual orientation (Tan, 1998). The lack of local vernacular to differentiate gender identity from sexual orientation has major implications to identity construction. Filipino transgender individuals may not have had the language to label their gender identity and may have experienced added distress and confusion. Some transgender men may have identified as *tomboy* to reference their masculine identity and expression, whereas some transgender women may have identified as *bakla*. And yet the same terms denote sexual

orientation for others. Some may not see themselves as gay or lesbian even if they have same-sex attractions because they do not fit to the gender expression of the *tomboy* and *bakla*. The increase in LGBTIQ+ representations, the opening to online media, and the formation of glocalized identities have created more spaces for constructing diverse genders and sexualities among Filipino LGBTIQ+ youth today.

Classed Constructions: *Bakla* vs. Gay, *Tomboy* vs. Lesbian

Further complicating these conflated constructions of gender and sexuality is class. In the Philippine context, socioeconomic class is often the more salient identity that intersects with gender and sexuality among other identities such as race or ethnicity (Ceperiano, Santos, Alonzo, & Ofreneo, 2016). Tan (1995, 2001) has documented how *bakla* has historically represented low-income effeminate men also known as the *parlorista* or the beauty parlor hairdresser, whereas gay men from the middle and upper class would express themselves discreetly, i.e., not feminine, and identify as gay. Similarly, the *tomboy* represented the low-income masculine or butch lesbian who stereotypically worked as a security guard (Josef, 1997, 1999). In a recent study by Canoy (2015), the cultural classed discourse surrounding gay, *bakla*, and transgender women identities shaped experiences of sexual and emotional intimacy. Using an intersectional lens, the working-class *bakla* or *parlor gay* has to pay straight men for sex and intimacy, while middle-class gay men can invest in a partnership and imagine having a normal and happy family.

In a country like the Philippines where poverty is prevalent and socioeconomic status or class is made more salient, experiences of the LGBTIQ+ community intersect with class. A study of LGBT Filipinos in the context of poverty showed how class shaped not only material poverty but also agency, security, dignity, and meaning in life (Thoreson, 2011). Low-income LGBT Filipinos struggled to find employment and provide not only for themselves but also for their families. Interestingly, the ability to earn and provide for one's family functioned as currency to gain family acceptance (Thoreson, 2011). Family acceptance or tolerance of one's gender and sexuality can come when LGBT family members are able to support the family financially or through other means (Ceperiano et al., 2016).

Class also intersects with gender and sexuality in terms of experiences of discrimination such as the degradation and debasement that target the low-income and more visibly gender nonconforming *bakla* and *tomboy* (Ceperiano et al., 2016). Unlike the discrete lesbian and gay (whose sexual orientation may be masked or hidden), the *bakla* and *tomboy* in urban poor communities experienced greater blatant discrimination. They experienced public ridicule, violence, and demeaning and degrading language such as being referred to as acts of perversion or *kababuyan* (indecent like pigs) (Ceperiano et al., 2016). Ceperiano and colleagues assert that tomboy and bakla fuse three stigmatized identities of being poor with nonnormative gender and nonnormative sexuality. The experience of discrimination is uniquely shaped by the classed and gendered constructions of sexuality that is not the same as how heterosexism is experienced in the West.

Filipino Transgender Identities: Babaylan to Transpinay/Transpinoy

With the dominant localized construction of *tomboy* and *bakla* conflating gender and sexuality, transgender experiences were made invisible in pre-globalization and pre-Internet Philippines. This section traces transgender representations before transgender as a term to signify transgender identity became part of glocalized constructions of gender identity in contemporary Philippines. The cinematic phrase “Babae ako, pusong babae ako” (I am a woman, I have the heart of a woman) recurs in Filipino actor Roderick Paulate’s films where he portrays queer characters, who can be constructed as transwomen or *bakla* or of feminine interiority (Alegre, 2021). This phrase captures the popular construction of a person assigned as man at birth and sees the self as a woman. It was common to hear “pusong babae” (heart of a woman or a woman inside) or “pusong lalaki” (heart of a man or a man inside) to refer to interiorized gender. Although Paulate never publicly identified as queer, he is usually lauded as the most accomplished and appealing character actor doing queer roles in the Philippines since the late 1970s. The significance of this line is that not only did Paulate represent the invisible and marginalized transgender and queer communities but articulated the unheard voice of *transpinays* or transgender Filipinas. In Paulate’s queer (*bakla*) roles, the struggles included being accepted by family and society while being the ultimate protagonist and hero.

Prior to the arrival of Christianity through Spanish colonization, there were groups of people in precolonial Philippines highly venerated in communities and believed to be shamans, elders, high priests, and leaders. They were the *Babaylans* or *Babaylanes*, *Catalonan*, *Asog*, or *Bayog* (Brewer, 1999). They are comparable to the status of the *Hijras* of South Asia in pre-colonial times; the *Bissu* of the Bugis tribe in Sulawesi, Indonesia; the *Mahu* of Hawaii; the *Fa’afafine* of the Samoas; and the *Two-Spirit* people of North America. It is probable that from Babaylan emerged the word *bakla*, the contraction of *babae* (woman) and *lalaki* (man), possibly a melding of “babaeng akala lalaki” (a woman thought to be man). *Bakla* was known to denote gender more than sexuality, the effeminacy of men, and this term carries on until today. But for the most part, *bakla* now denotes sexuality or attraction toward other men.

The self-identification of transness or being transgender was localized in the gay/lesbian identity formation for the longest time until the lexicon of transness became more accessible in the 2000s. The variations of identification could be seen as part of a spectrum within the *bakla* and the *tomboy* identities. *Bakla* who see themselves as feminine and with strong female interiority still refer to themselves as *bakla* (or *bayot* depending on where they live within the archipelago) and the same for *tomboy* with strong masculine interiority. Within the subculture of queer communities, the identification of *pa-girl* and *effem* emerged to specifically identify the feminine expressing and identifying *bakla*.

The emergence of transactivism eventually expanded transgender self-identification in the 2000s. The formation of STRAP (Society of Transsexual

Women of the Philippines), the first trans organization in the country, introduced the words *transpinay* (Filipina transwoman) and *transpinoy* (Filipino transman) (Alegre, 2020). The 2010s saw the first transmen organizations like Pinoy FTM (now Pioneer FTM) and Transmen Pilipinas. The popularity of queer independent films with increasing presence of queer actors such as in *Pusang Gala*, *Lalaki sa Buhay ni Selya*, and *Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros* and the introduction of *Zsa Zsa Zaturmah*, the first queer/trans superhero in comics, stage, and movies, inspired increased trans visibility (Inton-Campbell, 2017). The popularity of Filipino queer artist Vice Ganda alongside celebrities coming out as *transpinays* and *transpinoy*s increased queer visibility in the late 2000s to the 2010s.

Media examples like *Die Beautiful*, *Mamu*, and *Quickchange* and the emergence of Filipino trans celebrities like transmen singers Cy Seguera and Jake Zyrus and transwoman model Geena Rocero matching the expanding reach of their American counterparts in *RuPaul's Drag Race*, *Pose*, and celebrities like Janet Mock, Laverne Cox, Isis King, and Buck Angel, among others, have likely paved the way for the generation from the 2010s up to the present to self-identify as trans.

Negotiating Tomboy vs. Lesbian vs. Girl

Ofreneo (2000, 2003) shows an example of how Filipino adolescents negotiate *tomboy* and lesbian identities given the dominant local construction of *tomboy* as the “real” lesbian in the Philippines. Filipina female adolescents with same-sex attractions had unique developmental pathways as shaped by the *tomboy* identity, which defined a lesbian as masculine in gender expression. Those who were masculine and expressed wanting to be males identified and accepted being *tomboy* early in adolescence and became part of a *barkada* (group of friends) of tomboys in high school. Those who did not see themselves as *tomboy* went through a process of searching for alternative role models (to *tomboy*) and knowing more about sexual orientation. This group eventually identified as lesbian and asserted their womanhood (unlike the *tomboy*). The unique coexistence of the identities *tomboy* and lesbian shaped the divergent developmental trajectories of Filipina females with same-sex attractions and same-sex relationships.

On the other hand, Ceperiano, Santos, Alonzo, and Ofreneo (2016) show an example of how some Filipina women who have relationships with tomboys are not often seen as lesbian and may not also see themselves as lesbian. Given the perception that only a *tomboy* is the “real” lesbian, women can have a relationship with a *tomboy* and not identify as a lesbian. In this study, a woman in a relationship with a *tomboy* identified simply as a “girl.” “Girl” then denotes an identity of being like any other girl.

Negotiating Bi vs. Bakla vs. Gay

Similarly, Filipino men who are attracted to, and engage in sexual relations with other men navigate *bakla* and gay identities given the dominant local construction of *bakla* as the “feminine” gay. A unique construction of bisexual becomes a way of negotiating *bakla* and gay identities for a community of Filipino masculine men (who are gay in orientation but do not identify as gay). Baytan (2021) shows an example of how a group of Filipino masculine men who identify as *Bi* (bisexual) uniquely construct the identity *Bi* as distinct from the Western construction of bisexual attraction or sexual orientation (meaning attracted to the same and opposite sex). From the stories of men who identify as *Bi* on a dating website Planet Romeo, this group of men are gay in sexual orientation (attracted only to men) or only have same-sex relations. Their unique construction of *Bi* stems from refusing to identify with the effeminate *bakla* or gay identity. Baytan explains that while there are bisexual Filipino men in sexual orientation (in the Western sense), there are men who construct *Bi* as the masculine gay. As such, in this Filipino *Bi* community, gay has been equated to the effeminate or feminine gay while *Bi* represents the masculine gay. Baytan further explains that this is similar to the old conflation of gender (*bakla*) with sexuality (gay) where the identity *Bi* has come to represent the masculine gay (*Bi/gay*) vis-à-vis the *Bakla/gay*. What characterizes this group of Filipino *Bi* men in this virtual community is their assertion and expression of masculinity (*barako* or stud, *astig* or tough, discreet) and their exclusion of the effeminate *bakla/gay* (*effem*, *halata* or obvious, with *bahid* or trace). Within this gay subculture, there is sadly a revulsion or hatred for the effeminate and an ascendance of hypermasculinity.

Negotiating the Dialogical Tensions as a Transpinay

We tell the story of “Diana” who identifies as *transpinay* or Filipina/*Pinay* transgender woman, or simply a woman. Now in her late 20s, she narrates navigating identities and negotiating transness during adolescence. Diana was given a male name as she was assigned male at birth. She grew up as the youngest among four children from a middle-income family in Manila. They all grew up with a Catholic upbringing from their parents. With two older brothers and one older sister, in a middle-class or average-income family, she described her parents as conservative, devout Catholics, and strict, as they expected their children to follow societal conventions. Diana was expected to be masculine and align with all the ideals attached to masculinity. However, she discovered her feminine interiority as early as 6 years old and started to manifest effeminateness there on. Her older siblings teased her, and her parents constantly told her to outgrow the effeminateness and to be, as they say, a

“real man” which means becoming a man attracted to women and expressing in traditional masculine ways. From childhood until college, she struggled with her identity. She felt she really wanted to be a woman physically as she acknowledged her identity as female internally. But she knew she had to either convince her family to fully accept her gender identity or continue to live with the restrictions of society.

For most of her life, she tried to please her family and society, until she finally found the strength and courage to make a decision – to embrace her female identity internally and execute this externally. She translated this decision into action by letting her hair grow long, wearing women’s clothes, and self-identifying as “Diana” – a woman and a *transpinay*. When her family criticized her and expressed disdain or disapproval, she compartmentalized the pain and envisioned leaving them so she can finally be happy. She came to accept that Philippine society was ignorant of many issues because of its colonial mindset and learned to navigate situations and find safe spaces, until she decided to move to Japan as a performer. There she found friends like herself, men who liked her, and a society fascinated by her but not as rejecting as the society she experienced back home. She medically transitioned in Japan and in Thailand by doing transitioning surgeries and treatments. As she earned more money from work, she would send money to her family. Her family eventually learned to accept her. Now she looks back to how she navigated the tensions, how she accepted the disapproval and lack of understanding from her family and society, and how she made the decision to actualize and emancipate her true self. We can imagine a similar story to Diana’s with many *transpinays* – the long years of navigating dialogical tensions and having to conform and accept how one is positioned by others until one realizes and makes the decision to accept the social consequences if it means to be happy and authentic with one’s true self.

Conclusion: Amplifying Accepting and Agentic Voices

The LGBTIQ+ adolescent navigates multilayered and embedded contexts – from wider globalized society to local/glocal/glocalized communities shaped by local institutions, religion, law, history, and class to the particular context of families and to the inner world of the dialogical self. A challenge within developmental psychology is understanding how LGBTIQ+ adolescents and their families navigate these multilayered glocalized contexts toward fully accepting LGBTIQ+ identities; how LGBTIQ+ adolescents navigate the tensions within the family and dialogue with parents, siblings, and family members, toward a family that affirms, validates, cares, and loves them for who they are; how LGBTIQ+ adolescents navigate the dialogical tensions inside the self, toward developing a sense of self that is agentic and empowered; and how LGBTIQ+ adolescents and their families navigate the tensions within communities and societies, toward positive social inclusion, religious acceptance, and legal protection of LGBTIQ+ people.

This chapter has highlighted the following themes:

- Like all adolescents, one of the main developmental tasks for LGBTIQ+ teens is identity construction. This task is made complicated for LGBTIQ+ youth by multilayered local/global/glocalized contexts. It is made even more difficult and challenging by cisheteronormative norms that perpetuate societal discrimination and family rejection.
- LGBTIQ+ adolescents navigate their identities in the context of a spectrum of voices – from acceptance, to tolerance, to rejection – within their own families and in the broader context of their local communities and cultures, toward finding social and family acceptance. These voices from society, family, and others are internalized inside the dialogical self.
- Dialogical Self Theory or DST is helpful in understanding how LGBTIQ+ adolescents navigate the internal tensions between one's queer self/identity and internalized others, between the many voices of the self – likewise accepting, tolerating, or rejecting – toward coming to terms with one's queer identity, finding one's agentic voice, and arriving at self-acceptance.
- LGBTIQ+ adolescents navigate their identities in the unique glocalized constructions of queer identities as shaped by local and global cultures. Globalization and the Internet has afforded youth today with LGBTIQ+ media representations that can be agentic and empowering, especially in local cultures that remain oppressive toward queer experiences.
- The LGBTIQ+ adolescent experience needs to be understood in their unique family context as embedded in their unique local context interacting with the global/globalized world. It also has to be understood in the context of digital spaces and online media that is the world of the youth today. Understanding the local, cultural, social, political, economic, and historical context is important in comprehending how LGBTIQ+ youth experiences can be supported and affirmed.

“Self” and “dialogue” are the foundational concepts of DST. The dialogical self is a self with multiple selves characterized as I-positions, each with its own voice. The LGBTIQ+ adolescent as a dialogical self carries the voice of the queer self, alongside the many voices of internalized others – family, parents, friends, peers, society – who may be accepting or rejecting of one's queer self. The self itself has its own voices that may accept or reject the self – the self may see one's queer self as worthy of respect or deserving of love alongside seeing the queer self as unworthy and undeserving. Using DST, we understand how LGBTIQ+ adolescents navigate their queer identities inside the self through a process of dialogue with one's many selves. This highlights the reflexive dialogical process that occurs within the self that has interiorized society inside the self, alongside the external dialogue of the self with external others in the external world.

And while DST highlights the agentic process by which LGBTIQ+ adolescents navigate the self and their world, we wish to end this chapter on the important role of the family and society in this navigation process. The affirming voice inside the self can only come from the loving voice of a father, mother, and parent, the kind voice of a friend, the accepting voice of a sibling, and the caring voice of a teacher,

companion, or peer. Family acceptance will shape self-acceptance. Social acceptance will shape family and self-acceptance. The voice of the agentic and empowered self is strengthened when the voices of external others support one's identity, one's life, and one's existence.

How Can We Support LGBTIQ+ Adolescents in Their Journey Toward Accepting the Self? How Can We Support Parents and Families to Love and Care for Their LGBTIQ+ Children and Family Members?.

The journey toward acceptance of LGBTIQ+ identities is not an individual journey but a collective one. Just as our individual existence is an existence of interdependence, so too is LGBTIQ+ acceptance an interdependent process, a struggle, within societies and within selves. Recognizing a globalizing or glocalizing society means recognizing the increasing interconnectedness of cultures and identities, not only among nations and communities but also among individuals and families.

We return to the notion of an increasingly interconnected society and navigating its tensions toward amplifying the agentic voices within LGBTIQ+ adolescents and their families. In doing so, the ethics of care as constructed by feminist developmental psychologist Carol Gilligan comes to the forefront. As Way, Gilligan, and Noguera (2018) invoke the existence of a crisis of connection based on the lack or loss of the capacity of societies to care, it would follow that the navigation of our interconnected glocalised society to be agentic necessitates the amplification of voices that support the capacity to care.

As an ethic grounded in voice and relationships, in the importance of everyone having a voice, being listened to carefully (in their own right and on their own terms) and heard with respect. An ethics of care directs our attention to the need for responsiveness in relationships (paying attention, listening, responding) and to the costs of losing connection with oneself or with others. (Carol Gilligan, Interview with Foundation Critical Ethics of Care, 2011)

An ethics of care, characterized by empathy and respect, can amplify the social acceptance of LGBTIQ+ adolescents that families seek, amplify the family acceptance that LGBTIQ+ adolescents yearn, and amplify the self-acceptance that LGBTIQ+ adolescents require.

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Part II
Adolescence and Families in the Context of
Socio-Political Crisis and Civic
Engagement

Chapter 4

Navigating Two Worlds: Understanding Adolescent Development in Refugee Families



Catherine Solheim, Pamela Dysart, and Nusroon Fatiha

Introduction

My name is Yusra. Yes, I'm the girl who swam for her life, then swam at the Olympics. Now I want to tell you another story. It's about my other name, my other identity. You see, my name is refugee. At least, that's what they call me. Me and those 21 million others forced to flee persecution, war and violence. —Yusra Mardini

Source: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/i-am-yusra-i-am-refugee-and-im-proud-stand-peace>

Since the start of the twenty-first century, adolescents and their families have experienced forced displacement from their homelands in numbers unparalleled in history (United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2022). At the end of 2021, there were just over 89 million forcibly displaced persons globally, or about 1% of the world's population; the majority originated from five countries – Syrian Arab Republic, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Burma (Myanmar). Refugees, “people who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country” (UNHCR, 2022), accounted for 27 million of the 89 million forcibly displaced persons, half of whom were children under age 18. For the most recent data, see the Global Trends report published annually by the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees: <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends>. According to a World Bank report, increased conflict in many countries around the world disproportionately affects women and children, exposing them to severe discrimination and rendering them extremely vulnerable (Klugman, 2022).

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Refugee Resettlement: Contexts Influencing Refugee Adolescent Development

Permanent resettlement in host countries is a slow process. Refugees may spend years in the country of first refuge, often in camps, until they are processed and approved for resettlement. The 57,500 refugees resettled in 2021 represent less than 1% of forcibly displaced persons with refugee status (UNHCR, 2022). Unfortunately, this global crisis continues to escalate. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, declared:

Every year of the last decade, the numbers have climbed. Either the international community comes together to take action to address this human tragedy, resolve conflicts and find lasting solutions, or this terrible trend will continue. (UNHCR, 2022)

Ten countries host the most refugees including Turkey, Colombia, Uganda, Pakistan, Germany, Sudan, Bangladesh, Lebanon, Ethiopia, and Iran. Although the United States has historically admitted large numbers of refugees for resettlement, starting with 200,000 in 1980, successive administrations decreased this cap to an all-time low in 2021 of 15,000 admissions. The current administration reversed that trend; the 2023 cap stands at 125,000 admissions, and the majority of slots were designated for refugees from Africa and Southeast Asia (Klobucista et al., 2023). However, despite the ambitious aim, the administration has only been able to admit approximately 37,000 refugees in the past 2 years, which accounts for approximately 30% of the total target (Dhingra, 2022).

Resettlement Support

Resettlement support for refugees differs by country and, in the United States, may vary by state and by the specific agency responsible for resettlement services. Generally in the United States, refugee families receive 8 months of refugee cash assistance to meet their immediate needs including housing, food, cash assistance, clothing, medical assistance, case management, and social services including language training and employment support (Halpern, 2008). Refugees with children may be eligible for financial support from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, and single refugees may be eligible for Medicaid.

A high priority for all refugee adults is securing employment so they can begin to support themselves. Both groups are eligible to receive either Medicaid or TANF funding for up to 5 years. By this time, the Office of Refugee Resettlement expects all refugees to have achieved the goal of economic self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency means that they are earning an income that supports themselves or their families without government financial assistance (Halpern, 2008).

Soon after arrival, children and young adults under the age of 18 enroll in school. In the United States, young adults who experienced disruptions in their education

due to displacement and time in refugee camps may attend special schools where they can earn their general education degree and receive vocational training. Newly arriving refugee adults typically attend orientation sessions to learn about their host-country systems such as public transportation, currency, bill paying, and banking, work, and cultural norms.

Support for Mental Health, Specifically Trauma-Related Needs

Physiological needs such as food, clothing, and shelter, located at the bottom of Maslow's hierarchy (Maslow, 1943), are resettlement needs prioritized first by both refugee families and resettlement agencies. Although it is understandable, because these are survival-based needs, it is also important to tend to other human needs that contribute to psychological and emotional well-being, which are located just above physiological needs on Maslow's hierarchy, namely, safety and belonging. The mental health and well-being of refugees may significantly affect their ability to achieve a sense of safety and belonging.

Once a refugee family is resettled, many assume that fear and concern over safety will disappear. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Most forcibly displaced refugees experience trauma to some degree from persecution and violence, victimization, and the uncertain and arduous migration experience itself. Trauma is often unrecognized by healthcare providers who are not familiar with ways that refugees culturally conceptualize or describe mental health distress or trauma symptoms (Shannon et al., 2015; Simmelink & Shannon, 2012) or neglect to ask refugees about their history of war trauma (Shannon et al., 2012). Refugee healthcare provider communication difficulties and refugees' lack of trust in the healthcare system are also barriers for refugees receiving the timely screening that is necessary for diagnosis and treatment of trauma-related illness (Shannon et al., 2021).

Moreover, trauma does not end at the time of resettlement. In fact, it may continue to manifest and even increase due to discrimination and anti-immigrant sentiment in the host country (Beiser & Hou, 2016). Trauma therefore permeates the refugee experience, affecting those who have experienced it directly during premigration, during the migration process in the country of first refuge, and in resettlement in the host country. It also affects subsequent generations, namely, children and adolescents in refugee families, through transmission within family systems (Sangalang & Vang, 2017).

Unique Needs of Refugee Adolescents

Refugee adolescents face unique challenges and have specific needs as they navigate their way through a new country and culture at the same time as they are developing their sense of self, their personal identity. They must adjust to new social and

cultural norms while managing the trauma and uncertainty associated with displacement. They must straddle two cultures, that of their family and home country and that of their host country, the place they now call home. They must navigate family dynamics that arise from caregivers and elders' trauma from premigration violence experiences and stress from the prolonged and difficult migration process. They observe their parents struggle to adjust to their new lives and witness their stress as they worry about how they will provide and care for their families. As a result, adolescents in refugee families cope with intra-family stress simultaneously with their own acculturation stress, as they learn a new language, navigate an unfamiliar school system, and interact with dominant culture peers. Racially minoritized refugee adolescents must also deal with racial discrimination and anti-immigrant sentiment.

Conceptual Frameworks Informing Refugee Adolescent Development

This chapter examines the experiences of refugee adolescents in the context of their families, communities, and sociocultural contexts. Although we want to acknowledge that considerable diversity exists within the refugee adolescent population globally, we employ descriptions based on United Nations data that describe refugee population demographics. Refugee adolescents and their families typically are forcibly displaced from countries and cultures predominantly in the global South, African, Asian, and South American countries where populations are most likely often Black and Brown and racially homogenous. In contrast, refugee youth and their families from the global North and most likely Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) are often resettled in host countries located in the global North, e.g., Scandinavia, Western Europe, and North America, and in Australia and New Zealand, where privileged populations are White. As a result, minoritization of BIPOC refugee adolescents occurs from the moment they set foot in their host countries.

If we are to understand refugee adolescent development, we must begin with an appropriate conceptual model that fits for these youth, rather than one developed for dominant White culture adolescents. We begin by acknowledging the work of Cynthia Garcia Coll and Carola Suárez-Orozco, scholars who called scholars' attention to the importance of an integrative model of child and youth development that centered minoritized experiences at the intersection of social class, culture, ethnicity, and race. Their model also emphasized the important influences of racism, prejudice, systemic oppression, and discrimination on minoritized child and youth development.

In 2018, Carola Suárez-Orozco and colleagues built on the García Coll et al. (1996) model to propose a new framework that specifically focused on immigrant-origin children and youth. This model encompasses adolescents who were born

outside the host country and those born within the host country, including refugees, the subset of immigrant adolescents forcibly displaced from their home countries. The Suárez-Orozco et al. (2018) model adds to the intersectional social location influences highlighted in the García Coll et al. (1996) integrative model of development experiences of minoritized children; it includes acculturative tasks that are unique to immigrant and refugee adolescents. The model also acknowledges global forces that lead to refugees' forced displacement and subsequent resettlement and considers the political and social contexts of host countries that affect refugee families' resettlement experiences and influence adolescents' ability to integrate with peers and develop a sense of belonging.

A third conceptual framework that is important to understanding refugee adolescent development in the context of families is Masarik et al.'s (2022) family stress and resilience model (FSRM) for resettling refugee youth and their families. This framework employs a family systems' versus a child development lens to illustrate how refugee family stressors prior to and during resettlement contribute to family distress and adolescent family members' adjustment. It also encompasses an ecological lens to highlight how individual, family, school, and community level resources can reduce or disrupt resettlement stress and lead to positive youth outcomes.

In the following sections, we discuss ways that refugee adolescent development involves both normative developmental tasks plus added challenges that stem from their unique refugee family and community experiences. We conclude with factors that protect or buffer some of these challenges and contribute to positive outcomes for refugee adolescents. This chapter does not include an exhaustive review of a very large body of published peer-reviewed literature on refugee families and refugee children and adolescents. Rather, we highlight specific studies as examples to highlight key points in our discussion of challenges to refugee adolescent development and the resilience of these amazing young people, adolescents in families forcibly displaced by war, violence, and persecution.

Refugee Adolescent Development

Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. —Kofi Anann
Secretary General of the United Nations, 1997–2006

As adolescents go through normative stages of development, from dependence to independence (García Coll et al., 1996; Park, 2019; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018), they begin to shape their concept of self and their personal identity roughly between the ages of 10 and 19 (Ndengeyingoma et al., 2014). They develop an expanded and highly sensitive awareness of peer-group belonging or exclusion. They begin to challenge authority and develop autonomy at the same time they are learning how to “fit in.” They may test the boundaries of their parents' authority as they move through adolescence into adulthood. In sum, adolescence entails the exploration of

identity, adaptation to shifting responsibilities, and the potential experience of role ambiguity (Arnett, 2000; Weine et al., 2014). All of this describes the lives of adolescents in dominant White, Western societies, those who comprise most samples in the extant body of published research (Branje, 2022; García Coll et al., 1996; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018). Minoritized adolescents in Western and adolescents in non-Western cultures also navigate developmental tasks, although we know less about racial and cultural specific nuances of adolescent processes for those adolescents.

For refugees, adolescence presents unique challenges to normative development processes, requiring teens to navigate the expectations of their native culture as well as those of the host or resettlement country (Filler et al., 2021; Weine et al., 2014). Moreover, they must simultaneously cope with trauma from their own displacement and resettlement experiences, intergenerational transmission of trauma from adult caregivers' experiences of displacement and resettlement, and ongoing stress from their acculturation into the host society including experiences of stigma and discrimination. These additional layers add to the already complex, emotionally intense, and transformative process of development for refugee adolescents.

It is important to pause here to discuss how the timing of the premigration, migration, and resettlement journey of their family affects refugee adolescents' developmental tasks and experiences. Some directly experience forced displacement from their home countries with their families. Their adolescence is affected by the age at which forced displacement occurred and therefore exposure to and memory of violence, the number of years spent in a refugee camp or country of first refuge where they are exposed to uncertainty and harsh conditions, and the age at which permanent resettlement in a host country occurs. These adolescents may have trauma experiences similar to those of their adult caregivers, i.e., parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and older siblings, due to their direct exposure to persecution, armed conflict, violence, or human rights violations. A common experience is significant interruption in adolescents' education.

Another pathway for refugee adolescents is that they were born and spent their childhood years in refugee camps and resettled permanently as adolescents. We refer to these individuals as 1.5-generation refugee adolescents. They may have attended elementary school of some type while in the camp, but they most likely need to catch up to their host-country peers when resettled. Trauma, primarily from austere refugee camp conditions and ambiguity surrounding the timeline for resettlement, is also a significant influence in their lives.

Finally, some adolescents were born in their family's country of permanent resettlement. Their adult caregivers, i.e., parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and perhaps some older siblings, experienced traumatic exposure to persecution, armed conflict, and violence or human rights violations. We refer to these adolescents as second-generation refugee adolescents. They likely experience intergenerational transmission of trauma through family relationships. Due to space limitations, we briefly mention the experiences of unaccompanied minors, individual adolescents resettled by themselves without family members.

Challenges That Affect Refugee Adolescent Development

In the following sections, we briefly highlight some of the added layers of complexity that refugee adolescents experience as they move from childhood through adolescence into young adulthood. These include acculturation, adolescent-parent conflict, mental health issues, trauma and loss, and racism and discrimination. Our goal is to increase the awareness of this critical stage of life for these teens, primarily because families, teachers, and family professionals may miss some important challenges when these adolescents quickly gain language facility and appear to have successfully acculturated. Their apparent “success” or “resilience” may mask the tremendous stress they’re experiencing from navigating “two worlds” – that of their parents and community elders and that of their host-country peers in school and in the community. This “in-between” position puts tremendous responsibility and pressure on them to perform as the “bridge” generation in refugee families.

Acculturation

It is not easy to be stranded between two worlds, the sad truth is that we can never be completely comfortable in either world. —Sharon Kay Penman

Famous historical novelist

Acculturation is a broad term that encompasses the systematic, behavioral, and psychological changes individuals experience when engaging with two distinct cultures across various domains, including language, customs, social norms, attitudes, and identity (Berry, 2007). Multiple factors such as psychological well-being, sociocultural adaptation, cultural distance between home and host culture, and the interrelationship between group and individual acculturation processes influence acculturation (Poppitt & Frey, 2007). Research findings on the association between psychological well-being and acculturation present a complex picture. On one hand, higher levels of acculturation correlate with reduced psychological stress. However, it is important to note that higher levels of acculturation can also give rise to challenges, including negative self-image and low self-esteem, particularly among adolescents belonging to ethnic minority groups. Therefore, the relationship between acculturation and psychological well-being appears to be contradictory, with both positive and negative outcomes observed depending on various factors such as cultural context, individual experiences, and social support systems (Li & Guo, 2018).

Various dimensions of sociocultural adaptation, such as acquiring proficiency in the host language for effective communication and developing an understanding of the norms, beliefs, and values of the host culture, have a significant impact on how refugees fulfill their daily needs in the new society. These aspects play a crucial role in shaping their acculturation process, as they directly influence their ability to navigate social interactions, access resources, and integrate into the community. By attaining competence in the host language and embracing the cultural dynamics of their new environment, refugees enhance their capacity to adapt, establish

connections, and achieve a sense of belonging, which ultimately contributes to their successful acculturation (Andersson & Øverlien, 2023; Te Lindert et al., 2008).

The presence of multiple refugees from a particular country or culture who live in close geographic proximity to one another influences individual acculturation. Interactions with people from the adolescent's same country or culture reinforces their home cultural values and traditions and provides a secure base from which adolescents can explore host-country values and traditions and integrate the two cultures over time (Renzaho, 2009; Renzaho et al., 2022).

Acculturating refugee adolescents who are figuring out how to manage two cultures, that of their home country and that of the country in which they now live, typically opt for one of four strategies. An integration strategy is one in which they identify with both their host and home cultures; they may eventually embrace a bicultural identity, adopting values, norms, and behaviors from both home and host cultures that allows them to navigate both worlds.

If they choose to assimilate with the host culture as their strategy, they fully embrace the host country's new values, norms, and behaviors and reject those of their family and home culture. An opposite strategy to assimilation is to choose to separate or reject their host culture and remain firmly rooted in their home culture. Finally, they might experience marginalization, a strategy that leaves them in a state of limbo. They don't identify with either home or host culture (Poppitt & Frey, 2007).

The choice of acculturation strategy can have varying effects on adolescents, specifically influencing their experience of acculturative stress and resulting mental health outcomes. For instance, opting for separation or marginalization strategies may subject individuals to ongoing challenges like discrimination and alienation. This may lead to poor mental health outcomes such as depression symptoms or even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Conversely, embracing a more integrative approach such as acculturation may contribute to more positive mental health outcomes (Arakelyan & Ager, 2021).

Effects of Acculturation on Mental Health When confronted with the task of adjusting to a new host culture while simultaneously preserving aspects of their native cultures, refugee adolescents encounter psychological distress, commonly known as acculturative stress (Bae, 2020). Acculturative stress can compound stress that is already inherent in normative adolescent processes such as developing autonomy and a sense of identity (Ellis et al., 2008). Adolescents, especially around the age of 12 who are just beginning their developmental journey, are more susceptible to acculturation issues (Poppitt & Frey, 2007).

Acculturative stress arises from multiple challenges that adolescent refugees must overcome in their intertwined developmental and acculturation journeys. They must deal with anti-immigrant sentiment and racial discrimination. They must learn about values, norms, and behaviors of the host-country culture and struggle to resolve differences when they clash with those of their home culture. For example, adolescent refugees often encounter conflicting gender role expectations between home and host cultures for women and men. They face the developmental task of shaping a

racial-ethnic identity that allows them to fit in and belong in their new home yet retain the solid foundation that their root cultural identity provides. They struggle to gain proficiency in a second language that enables them to effectively communicate with peers and authority figures such as teachers while maintaining their root language for family communication (Andersson & Øverlien, 2023; d'Abreu et al., 2019; Galchenko & de Vijver, 2007; Picton & Banfield, 2020; Poppitt & Frey, 2007).

Cultural Distance The greater the degree of cultural distance or perceived difference between the home culture and the host culture, the more likely adolescent refugees will experience acculturative stress (Poppitt & Frey, 2007). For example, Asian students from collectivist cultures that prioritize group harmony, interdependence, and mutual social support may experience higher levels of stress in Australian society, with its individualistic culture that emphasizes independent problem-solving (Galchenko & de Vijver, 2007).

Unaccompanied Minors Unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs) are vulnerable adolescents who have fled persecution, abuse, or violence and arrived in the host country (currently only the United States) without a parent or guardian. The process of cultural adaptation for these individuals can introduce additional challenges and a higher prevalence of mental health issues. URMs commonly experience problems such as PTSD, major depressive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, adjustment disorders, panic attacks, and somatization. Lacking parental or caregiver support places them at a disadvantage, which can lead to internalizing problems and traumatic stress reactions. Some URMs may find it challenging to adjust to the expectation of independence after turning 18 in the United States. The disparity in autonomy compared to their nonmigrant peers surprises them, especially when they consider their relative independence in refugee camps (Andersson & Øverlien, 2023; El-Awad et al., 2017; Socha et al., 2016).

Intergenerational Conflict

Adolescents' struggles to acculturate and learn the language of the host culture, while also preserving their root culture values and language, and maintaining a healthy parent-child relationship, can lead to the development of post-traumatic stress and depressive symptoms (Bae, 2020; Betancourt et al., 2017). In intergenerational households, there is a natural expectation of parents that their offspring preserve the family's cultural heritage. However, as adolescents begin attending school in the host country, they encounter pressure to adapt swiftly to the new culture. In contrast, the older generation generally moves more slowly toward embracing host culture behaviors and traditions. This dynamic creates a discrepancy between the cultural practices and values of the two generations in a family, which can lead to adolescents feeling frustrated and even distressed when the differences are especially apparent (Arkelyan & Ager, 2021). Intergenerational conflicts, often over

parents' misunderstanding of their teens' adoption of host culture language and behaviors, have potential to hinder the process of post-migration adjustment for all generations involved (Milner & Khawaja, 2010). For 1st- and 1.5-generation refugee adolescents, acculturative stress can exacerbate the trauma they are already experiencing due to forced displacement and the prolonged migration process.

Adolescents may feel distant from their parents when they acculturate at a more rapid rate than their parents do. This results in a familial acculturative "gap," which can cause stress within the family system. The widening cultural gap between parents and adolescents further exacerbates conflicts and hinders the adolescent's adjustment. This gap between adolescents and their parents tends to widen as they spend more time in the host country.

In a recent study, Sudanese adolescents reported feeling disconnected from their parents, and teens often experienced a clash between the cultural expectations of their school and their home (d'Abreu et al., 2021). Completely embracing the host culture and rejecting the home culture (assimilation) can lead to conflict within the family. Parents expressed concerns about their children's acculturation and feared the potential loss of home culture values and adoption of behaviors that are normative in the host country but are unacceptable in their home culture. In particular, they feared the negative impacts of exposure to a new culture regarding clothing, drugs, and interactions with the opposite sex (d'Abreu et al., 2021). Translating for their parents or being criticized by their parents for becoming "too American" has been linked to higher levels of PTSD and depressive symptoms in refugee adolescents (Bettman et al., 2016).

Adolescents also struggled when their parents longed for the past and talked about returning to their homeland while teens were trying to acculturate, create a sense of belonging, and build a future in their new homeland. A quote from Filler et al.'s (2021) qualitative study with the Syrian youth in Canada reflected this different outlook between dad and teen:

I see people dying in Syria and I feel so sad, and in Lebanon I'm happy now. In Canada like I'm so happy I'm not going back in Syria, my dad sometimes says let's go in Syria. (p. 770)

Trauma

Refugees often carry with them the invisible scars of trauma. Their experiences of war, persecution, and forced displacement leave deep wounds that can affect their physical and mental well-being long after they have found a place of safety. —Ban Ki-moon

Eighth Secretary General of the United Nations, 2007–2016

Although the United Nations' agencies such as UNESCO do not typically disaggregate data in monitory reports by age, the number of school-aged children, which include adolescents, is staggering. A 2019 UNESCO report published online, updated in April of 2023, reported that approximately one-third of refugee children in German schools suffered from mental illness and one-fifth had a more serious diagnosis of PTSD. Germany is one of the top 10 host countries for refugee resettlement. The Netherlands reported 13–25% of children in schools with PTSD or

depression diagnoses. The rates are even direr, reported as high as 75% in Darfur, Sudan, when children resettle in middle- or low-income countries of first refuge after forced displacement. These countries have few resources to intervene in trauma-related illness.

Among refugee adolescents, there is a complex interplay of symptoms involving trauma exposure, cultural influences, and the manifestation of mental illness (Betancourt et al., 2017). Higher levels of exposure to traumatic experiences often correspond to an increased likelihood of experiencing related symptoms, a phenomenon known as the dose-response model. Additionally, cultural backgrounds play a significant role in how refugee adolescents express their distress. Refugee adolescents often describe physical symptoms that reflect their psychological distress (Betancourt et al., 2017).

Disruptions to attachment bonds increase refugee adolescents' vulnerability to mental health issues even after resettlement. Without a secure base that comes from country, community, culture, friends, family, and social support systems, they may experience grief. The discontinuation or disruption of interpersonal bonds, coupled with the pressures of adapting to a new host culture, can disrupt adolescents' attachment system and compound their challenges related to acculturation (Ponciano et al., 2022). According to a study conducted by Betancourt et al. (2017), refugee youth experience compromised caregiving and increased exposure to community violence due to residing in affordable housing communities, often located in urban areas with high levels of violence. These factors can significantly contribute to mental health issues later in life, surpassing the impact of early traumas (Betancourt et al., 2017).

Loss Loss, both concrete loss and ambiguous loss, is also part of the refugee resettlement narrative. First- and 1.5-generation refugees, including adolescents, most likely experience the deaths of family members or friends due to violence or persecution in their home countries prior to escaping or during the migration process. Forced to flee, they leave homes and material possessions behind. They do not have time to grieve their losses in the immediacy of their escape, and perhaps not for years until resettlement. Once they arrive in the host country, the challenges and stresses of resettlement, the restrictions of local policies that prohibit culturally based death rituals, or the absence of family and community to support shared mourning may further delay the grieving process. Delayed grieving of concrete losses may result in complicated grief for the family.

Moreover, ambiguous losses (Boss, 2016), those that are ongoing and filled with uncertainty, involve people, places, symbols, and ways of life that are no longer physically connected to one's current everyday experiences but yet are psychologically present on a daily basis. This type of loss permeates the lived experiences of refugees; it may stem from loss of homeland, culture, language, security, status, etc. Many hold onto hope that they will be able to return to their homeland and resume their previous lives. They may be unsure whether some family members or friends survived the violence or the forced displacement journey. If they did survive, they may not know where they are living. If they know that family members remain in

their home country, they think about and worry about their safety and well-being continuously.

Migration and relocation causing the loss of extended family members can bring about feelings of sadness and loneliness for both adults and adolescent refugees. 1.5- and second-generation adolescent refugees must cope with the loss of close geographic proximity to family, homeland, culture, language, nationality, security, and status. In the resettlement process, 1.5-generation adolescent refugees have lost the physical presence of their home country while keeping it alive in their minds, maintaining psychological awareness of what it was like to live there. Second-generation adolescent refugees may not have lived in the home country, but know about it through family stories. They may feel their parents' and older siblings' losses indirectly through witnessing their sadness and grief. Loss, whether concrete or ambiguous, direct or indirect, adds to the emotional burden of refugee adolescents and affects their psychosocial and mental health outcomes (Arakelyan & Ager, 2021).

Trauma Treatment Refugee adolescents often do not receive the critical trauma care they need due to barriers including language difficulties, unfamiliarity with Western intervention models, lack of culturally sensitive interventions, and financial constraints (Mayor, 2019). Although recognition of the critical need for trauma-informed care in school settings has increased, a review published in 2019 by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) revealed that the provision of appropriate training and resources for trauma interventions in schools is “almost universally lacking” (UNESCO, 2019).

Teachers face various challenges when it comes to supporting refugee students in educational settings, particularly in addressing the specific needs of students who have experienced trauma. In many cases, teachers may not even be aware of the presence of refugee students in their classrooms and may lack knowledge about their unique experiences as individuals who have recently resettled in a new country (McBrien, 2005). As mentioned earlier, refugee students often grapple with mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression, necessitating additional support within the school environment. However, without proper training on how to recognize trauma expression or on trauma prevention and intervention strategies, teachers may find it challenging to provide the necessary support for refugee adolescents. One study found that a significant majority (87%) of Canadian teachers felt inadequately prepared to address mental health concerns, as the focus of their training was academic success outcomes rather than attending to students' socio-emotional well-being (Mayor, 2019).

Education

Education is a human capital investment that is critical for the long-term success and well-being of all adolescents. It equips them with the necessary skills and credentials to pursue further education, vocational training, and employment. Refugee

adolescents face additional hurdles to achieving their education. Generally, they may receive poor or failing grades, experience low or incomplete enrollment, and exhibit higher dropout rates than their dominant culture host-country peers (Ocampo et al., 2020).

A pattern of spotty academic attachment begins prior to adolescence; UNCHR (n.d.) reported that primary school enrollment rates were 63% for refugee children compared to 91% for their non-refugee peers. Numerous factors contribute to school dropout including poverty, low self-perception of academic ability, social rejection, and difficulties adapting to education systems and cultural contexts of the host country (McBrien, 2005). We elaborate on a few of these factors in the following section.

School Culture Adaptation to schools in the host country tends to be less problematic if refugee adolescents attended school with a similar educational culture in their home countries. Conversely, students who experience their new school's culture as very different may struggle to comprehend new expectations and norms, which can contribute to difficulties in adjustment.

Refugees from non-Western countries are likely to have experienced school environments as more authoritarian where teachers employ strict rules and severe punishment to maintain discipline. In contrast, schools in the West may seem to lack behavioral regulations. Adolescent refugee students may struggle to navigate this newfound freedom of thought and behavior. After observing their host-country peers pushing boundaries and exercising autonomy, they may attempt to behave in a similar fashion. However, this may get them into trouble. Because of a heightened focus on these minoritized students as refugees and as students who are struggling with language and coursework who are also likely dealing with first- or secondhand trauma, they may be labeled as “disciplinary problems” (McBrien, 2005, p. 346). The alienation they experience from their parents due to a widening acculturation gap and the stigmatization they face from dominant host-country peers compound their challenges. These “problematic” refugee adolescents may turn to negative coping mechanisms such as getting involved in gangs, abusing alcohol and drugs, dropping out of school, or engaging in risky sexual behavior (McBrien, 2005).

School Environment The presence of hostile school environments in the host country that perpetuate racial and ethnic discrimination or harbor anti-immigrant sentiment can significantly impede the academic progress of refugee students. Wilkinson (2002) found that refugee students of White or European descent showed higher academic success in Canadian schools, while those of Asian or African descent faced more challenges in adapting to the new system. During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese students in America faced various forms of stigmatization, ranging from “overt racism to covert microaggressions” (Ma & Zhan, 2022, p. 10). They reported incidents of being told to “go home,” hearing “coronavirus” whispered loudly as they walked by, and receiving stares that made them feel uncomfortable and fearful.

Timing Refugees who arrive in their host country after residing in a country of first refuge for several years often encounter greater difficulties in adjusting to their new educational environment. During their years in the country of first refuge, these children may face inconsistent access to education if the schools available to them are not of high quality. When they arrive in the host country, they have not only fallen behind in their studies, but they need to acclimate to yet another culture and language while trying to catch up on learning they missed during their displacement and resettlement journey.

Despite policy efforts and government initiatives, ensuring equal access to education remains a challenge for refugee students in host countries. For instance, Greece has increased the number of special reception classes in state-run schools on the mainland to promote the inclusion of refugee children. However, because Greece often grants temporary stay on their islands to forcibly displaced persons, it can take several months to relocate them to the mainland, resulting in a delayed school start (UNHCR, n.d.). Additional and slightly different acculturation demands exacerbate the youth delayed school challenges when they reach their final resettlement destination of mainland Greece (d'Abreu et al., 2021).

Teacher Preparation Teachers in host countries are also part of the formula for refugee student success. Unfortunately, teacher-training programs worldwide often neglect the incorporation of culturally responsive education, an approach that recognizes and values the influence of cultural heritage on students' learning styles and attitudes. This omission is often justified by citing resource constraints or invoking political sensitivity (Gay, 2002; Roux & Moller, 2003). In the absence of a culturally responsive environment, teachers struggle to create a learning atmosphere that respects and integrates cultural knowledge into the educational process, hindering the development of sociocultural awareness and motivation among learners (Soylu et al., 2020). Studies about the integration of Hmong refugees from Laos into Minnesota schools have found that in spite of the large number of students with Hmong ethnic backgrounds, parents were disappointed that there was no support in public schools for Hmong language or recognition of Hmong culture or the history of Hmong migration to the United States (Xiong et al., 2022).

Family Engagement Various family and parental factors, such as the family's economic situation and the teen-parent acculturation gap, can hinder refugee students' progress in schools. Hmong refugee parents residing in Minnesota and Wisconsin expressed unfamiliarity with the concept of parent-teacher conferences and therefore were reluctant to participate. Similarly, Southeast Asian and Khmer refugee parents tended to have lower expectations for their involvement in their children's education and viewed teachers as the "educational experts" (McBrien, 2005, p. 345), which led them to stay away and let the teachers handle school-related issues. Hmong parents found the US educational system confusing, as their notion of learning from their experience in Laos and Thailand primarily revolved around rote memorization. Conflict often arose between teenagers and their parents when

parents perceived their children as not studying enough, while the teenagers attributed problems at school to their parents (McBrien, 2005).

Racism and Discrimination

Refugees and immigrants are not threats to our society; they are individuals seeking safety and a better life. It is our duty to embrace them with compassion and reject the discrimination that denies their humanity. Unknown

Throughout history, immigrants and refugees in many Western countries generally, and in the United States specifically, have been portrayed as security threats, drains on the economy, and potential criminals, despite data that show that none of the aforementioned are accurate (Yoon et al., 2023). Refugee families may opt to settle in host countries that have preconceived notions about them before they even set foot in the country. Undercurrents of racism add another layer of complexity if refugees of color resettle in a White supremacist host country.

Although adolescent refugees may have been a member of a racial majority in their home countries and/or in refugee camps, the host country may minoritize them based on their racial-ethnic identity. Racism and discrimination by the dominant society may ensue, rendering adolescent refugees vulnerable during a stage of development when they are seeking ways to belong and fit in with their peers (Gifford et al., 2007).

Adolescent refugees experience varying degrees of discrimination. For example, refugees who experience wider cultural gaps between their home and host cultures, such as Western versus Eastern cultures, and who display visible cultural markers that identify some aspect of their social identity, such as headscarves worn by Muslim female-identifying refugees from Africa, may experience more discrimination. They may have more difficulty adjusting to the new host culture and may experience more depressive symptoms than those who do not have to deal with discrimination (d'Abreu et al., 2019).

Refugee Adolescent Resilience

In the face of unimaginable hardships, refugees demonstrate an indomitable spirit and resilience that reminds us of the strength of the human will.

—Samantha Power, Administrator of the US Agency for International Development under President Joe Biden

Although the prior sections have focused on issues and challenges for refugee adolescent development in the context of resettlement, we want to discuss here the remarkable resilience of these youth. Language acquisition and friend groups, academic success, and community engagement are all powerful protective factors and resources for the refugee youth that can lead to adolescent well-being and resilience (Masarik et al., 2022). In spite of the challenges that refugee adolescents face as

they acculturate and form their identities, an exclusive deficit focus overlooks the tremendous assets that these teens bring to their host countries and communities.

Protective Factors

A body of research has identified several factors that serve to protect these youth and buffer the trauma and stress that is inherent in the refugee resettlement process. Refugee youth who feel support from their families, their peers, their neighbors, and their schools report higher levels of well-being than those who lack these systems of support (Fazel et al., 2012; Marley & Mauki, 2018; Tozer et al., 2018). Having peers who accept them buffers the sting of discrimination for refugee teens (Fazel et al., 2012). Stable housing allows families and their adolescents to build neighborhood connections, a sense of belonging, and longer-term connections to schools and peers, all of which contribute to adolescent well-being (Tozer et al., 2018). Refugee adolescents and their parents understand cultural differences (d'Abreu et al., 2021) that allow them to engage in culturally integrated friendships. This in turn generates support from both home and host cultures, including family, friends, and community members, all of whom can buffer the negative effects of acculturative stress (Poppitt & Frey, 2007).

Conclusion

It is important to pay attention to the refugee family experience, specifically to examine the intricacies of the adolescent refugee development process. Throughout the complex process of identity formation, adolescent refugees not only deal with normative developmental tasks of adolescence, but they also cope with additional tasks related to being a member of a family with a refugee background. They must work through acculturation that requires them to integrate home and host cultures. They must strike a balance between honoring their family's culture and adopting host culture norms to be able to fit in with peers. They must cope with their parents' acculturation that may lag behind them and cause intergenerational conflict. They must deal with the consequences of education lapses during displacement and migration that may require them to do remedial schoolwork to catch up with their same-age peers. They must heal from unresolved trauma from violence prior to displacement and cope with ongoing stress from racism and discrimination in the host country.

Many studies have examined refugee children under age 18, and although the youth are included, they fail to examine the refugee adolescent experience specifically. More studies need to consider ways that adolescent refugees cope with resettlement in the context of family, neighborhood, school, and host society systems. These young people navigate two worlds as they complete their education,

contribute to their families, form intimate relationships, become members of the community, and engage in society. It is important that the youth and family scholars and practitioners invest in ways to support refugee adolescents affected by trauma, either directly through the displacement and resettlement experience or intergenerationally through their family relationships. We have much to learn from these young people. They are a testament to human resilience.

Refugees are people like anyone else, like you and me. They led ordinary lives before becoming displaced, and their biggest dream is to be able to live normally again. Let us remember that together, we can make a difference. —Khaled Hosseini

Author and Goodwill Ambassador for UNHCR

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Chapter 5

Ambiguous Loss Among Families and Adolescents of Missing Persons: A Mexican Case Study



Rosario Esteinou and Mariel A. Reyes

Introduction

Extreme violence in societies that are unsettled by political instability, armed conflict, or authoritarian governments has been instrumental in individuals' disappearance. This has not been a minor social phenomenon. Not only have a large number of people disappeared while institutional and social life show signs of deterioration, but also its devastating impact on their families has had grave consequences. However, in the last two decades, this issue has become more complex globally since other convoluted factors have influenced and exacerbated it: migration flows, the development and expansion of drug trafficking and organized crime, corruption and collusion between authorities and organized crime, and natural disasters (International Commission of Missing Persons-ICMP, 2021).

The available information on missing people and its effects to implement measures and eradicate the problem has been insufficient and challenging. On the one hand, legal instruments for reporting, searching, and criminalization have improved; for example, forensic identification techniques have developed, and some victim care measures have been adopted (International Committee of the Red Cross-ICRC, 2020; ICMP, 2021). On the other hand, knowledge building presents significant biases and limitations mainly due to underreporting (e.g., not reporting for fear of reprisals), nonrecognition of the phenomenon by governments (Hanson, 2016; ICMP, 2021; Morewitz & Sturdy, 2016), and the prevalence of a bureaucratic view

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that privileges “identification and procedures over support and communication with relatives of the missing” (Edkins, 2011, p. 196). Indeed, much less knowledge is available globally about the effects of missing persons on relatives, child and adolescent development, and family functioning. Also, much of the attention and support for relatives of missing individuals have come from other families with similar experience, supportive nongovernmental organizations, scholars, and volunteers (CLACSO, 2019; Reyes, 2018). In the case of Latin American countries, the existing literature has primarily focused on political denunciation of disappearances and the relatives’ search strategies (ICMP, 2021; Lira, 2010). Less research is done to show the family members’ experiences and the changes they go through as a family group (Delacroix, 2020; Díaz, Yankelevich et al., 2020; Guatavita, 2015; Latin American Social Sciences Council-CLACSO, 2019): the type of issues that characterize, in Boss’s (1999) term, as “ambiguous loss.” However, this concept is less known or researched in the context of Latin American cases, which means that they have yet to be analyzed from this perspective. The current conventional approaches are inappropriate in most cases, and they tend to reproduce the suffering and helplessness these families experience.

This chapter aims to analyze the experiences of the Martinezes, a Mexican family from a low socioeconomic background, and discusses the disappearance of two of its members in 2012. We will address its effects on each individual’s life and as a family group. Specifically, we describe the reported experience by the mother, Esperanza, regarding her son, who was an adolescent at the time of the disappearance of his siblings, herself, and her husband; this chapter then examines how these experiences affected the family functioning, their identities, and coping strategies and how they built resilience through the meaning-making process of ambiguous loss.

Based on the available literature, this case qualitatively represents what several Latin American families go through. Our analysis intends to contribute to a better understanding of their needs to further implement adequate support measures. Such an understanding must be situated within socio-ecological perspectives, developed by Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979), which emphasize that reciprocal and multifaceted interactions between the individual and the social environmental levels create the phenomenon and mold individual experiences.

The second part of this chapter highlights different aspects of the social dimension regarding a person’s disappearance, which make it an even more concerning problem in Latin America. The third part introduces the conceptual and methodological underpinnings that inform our phenomenological analysis of the Martinez family’s experiences of their two missing sons/brothers. In the fourth part, we present Esperanza’s narratives about the family and violence contexts, the disappearance’s incident, the search of their sons, and the subsequent emotional turmoil and changes they have gone through over 8 years, individually and in their relationships as a family. This is “first-order” information told in its own terms by Esperanza. In the fifth part, we analyze the experiences based on the ambiguous loss approach: the strategies, the meaning-making, and “the psychological family” as mechanisms of resilience and its challenges. Some final recommendations are made at the end of the chapter.

The Social Dimension of Persons' Disappearance

As we noted before, the disappearance of people can be caused by different factors. In the case of many Latin American countries, in the last two and a half decades, this issue is significantly associated to problems of drug trafficking and organized crime, which often occur in complicity with the authorities, in particular the police and army (Díaz et al., 2020; Guatavita, 2015; Reyes, 2018). For instance, in Mexico, it is estimated that between 1964 and 2022, 100,000 persons have disappeared (Interior Ministry-SEGOB, 2022). From this figure, 60,000 cases resulted from organized crime and the war against drug trafficking initiated in 2006. In Colombia, it is estimated that 70,000 people have disappeared due to five decades of civil conflict between political authorities and military, guerrilla, and organized crime groups (Díaz, 2020; ICMP, 2021; Ovalle, 2019).

Whereas more attention is devoted to the increasing number of missing persons in this region, less efforts are made to explore the social dimensions of its impact. Understanding of the underlying social factors will lead to a more nuanced analysis of this problem. Holmes (2016) has pointed out the relational dimension involved. That is, not only we need to consider the missing person, but all those who miss him/her. When a loved one is missing, finding and reconnecting to him/her takes precedence as a motivational need of vital importance (Edkins, 2011, p. 49) above those posited by Maslow (1943) that become secondary such as food, clothing, or even health.

As the relationships with the missing person are individualized, family members (and also friends, neighbors, or coworkers) would be affected differently, and their emotional or other responses might also differ. When the relational dimension is considered, the phenomenon of missing persons becomes highly relevant at individual and societal levels. The Missing People organization in the United Kingdom, for example, has estimated that, for every missing person incident, an average of 5 intimate people (a family member or close friend) is affected and, at a higher estimate, 15 best friends (Holmes, 2016, pp. 105–106). Considering that several Latin American countries have reported large numbers of missing persons, the proportion of family members and friends affected is very high, and, therefore, it represents a problem with a worrisome social dimension.

Also, we must consider another aspect of its social dimension and the challenges that this issue imposes on individuals' reliance on the system and social life. The growing concern over missing persons also leads to a lack of trust in institutions and normativity. It challenges the way individuals and families experience collective life; its meaning, support, and security; as well as the trust they place in institutions. Del Cioppo (2020, p. 32) and Yankelevich (2017) have pointed out, referring to the Mexican case, that several relatives experience an immense feeling of helplessness, as state agencies, often, far from containing violence, execute disappearances; are accomplices of those who carry them out; and are negligent, insensitive, and indifferent to do justice. Therefore, the process of meaning-making, how individuals construe a sense of their lives in social coordinates, is compromised.

Strictly related to the above, several family members, when searching and reporting their missing member to public authorities, go through a gradual process of differentiating the attribution of the disappearance to social and institutional factors (e.g., organized crime, police and army members), rather than individual and family issues. This differentiation process is inextricably linked to experiencing ambiguous loss at the individual level, as we will see in the next section.

Yankelevich (2020) and Holmes (2016) discuss the ambiguous status of missing individuals and how the families have difficulty processing their biological and social death. Because the death of a person is significant to others, it is an event that has many repercussions at individual, social, and institutional levels:

The bereaved mourn, assets are distributed, custody of children is reassigned, life insurance is collected, funeral services are contracted, death certificates are drawn up, deaths are recorded in the civil registry books, all future plans of everyone referring to the deceased are canceled, income from their salary ceases to be received, criminal investigations are initiated ... among others. A duly identified body or human remains are never the missing person, but only the evidence that it is impossible to find them because they have died, and that, therefore, it is possible to stop looking for them, as part of restoring to them the social death of which the disappearance deprived them. (Yankelevich, 2020, pp. 27–28)

When societies have a legacy of large numbers of missing persons, as is the case in several Latin American societies, suffering and pain remain a deep-rooted problem not only in the hearts of victims but also within shattered and abused societies. This is true, particularly, in those countries struggling to emerge from conflict, legacies of human rights breaches, and decades of organized crime (ICMP, 2021). The disappearance of persons is a form of violence or a consequence of multiple acts of it that generate enormous suffering in their family members (Del Cioppo, 2020) and weaken the normative ground.

Ambiguous Loss as a Life Experience: Conceptual and Methodological Underpinnings

Our study adopts a phenomenological approach and is based on a case study. We conducted an in-depth qualitative interview in four sessions of approximately 90 minutes each between June and December of 2021.¹ We followed Seidman's (2006) and Brinkmann's (2013) recommendations, exploring Esperanza's and her family's life history,² their experience about the disappearance of her two eldest sons (Juan and David), its effects on their individual and family life, and their meaning-making process of ambiguous loss. We wanted to interview her youngest son, Carlos, who was an adolescent at the time of the disappearance, but he refused.

¹ June sixth and 27th, July 29th, and December 10th.

² We have given fictitious names to all members of the family to preserve their anonymity and have omitted the names of places and other sensitive information for the same reason.

Analyzing the impacts of missing loved ones on family members is complex and challenging. It requires us to consider the distinction that Schutz (1982) made between “observational understanding” and “subjective understanding.” In the former, we, as researchers, may observe family members’ actions and experiences from an external standpoint, which may not correspond to how the family member sees his/her own behavior. Most conceptual approaches to disappearance are placed in this epistemological position. The latter is based on the meaning that the family member makes of the missing loved one. When a person tells his/her story about some relevant experience, he/she essentially performs a meaning-making process. He/she selects the constituent details of his/her experience, reflects on them, gives them an order, and thereby constructs meaning from that experience. The narrative they create affects the way they make sense of that experience (Seidman, 2006, pp. 9–10).

Phenomenology explores the relationship between an individual and the material world they live in. How I experience the world outside and understand my relationship with others shapes my consciousness and understanding of who I am (Brinkmann, 2013; Larking & Thompson, 2012). Meaning is then fundamental because consciousness “makes the world possible as such, not in the sense of making its existence possible but in the sense that it makes a meaningful world possible” (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, phenomenological research is a situated enterprise. It has been termed “hermeneutic because while it can be descriptive in its inclination, it can only be interpretive in its implementation” (Larking & Thompson, 2012, p. 102).

In the field of mental health, the phenomenological approach has been used to examine how people make sense of their major life experiences. This has especially been the case with interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), developed and applied in the United Kingdom’s national health system (see the volume by Smith et al., 2009). It is based on the foundational principle of phenomenology proposed by Husserl (1970) that experience should be examined in the way it occurs and “on its own terms.” Therefore, it must prioritize how it is experienced since such experience is given a priori to the scientific theories we can formulate about them. For this reason, phenomenologically based qualitative research needs to provide first-order understanding through the concrete description of those experiences. From this description, the scientist will be able to interpret it, offering a second-order understanding of the world (Brinkmann, 2013; Schutz, 1982; Smith et al., 2009; Spencer & Ritchie, 2012). These conceptual underpinnings are appropriate to analyze the experience of the disappearance of a loved one as it is a significant fundamental event that changes the lives and meanings of missing person’s family members. Also, based on Esperanza’s narrative about her experience; her son, Carlos; and her husband, Luis, we will describe “on her own terms” these experiences. From her descriptions, we will offer a second-order understanding of them and the meaning-making process about their loss and the ways they coped with it in their lives individually and as a family group.

For the analysis, we also included in our phenomenological approach the conceptual tenets made primarily by Boss (1999) and Holmes (2016) of ambiguous loss

and trauma, as a distinct experience lived by family members of missing persons. These authors, as well as Wayland et al. (2016), have pointed out that the classical theories of trauma bereavement, and grief, and the therapeutic support they have offered are not appropriate to address the loss of a missing person as they do not grasp their specific features. Further, they have argued that, indeed, the consistent presence of several symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), emotional problems, or persistent complex grief disorder (e.g., intrusive thoughts about the missing person, sleep disturbances, depression, anxiety, hypervigilance, extreme distress, functional impairment, conflict, and somatization) is a recurrent theme and similar behavioral pattern rather than randomness among family members of missing persons; it is the rule, not an exception. But the psychological impact of the disappearance does not qualify for a diagnosis of PTSD, as it includes overlapping but distinct symptoms. Consequently, family members' experiences and issues have been inappropriately assessed along the lines of classical theories and thus have often been understood as pathological or abnormal.

According to Boss (2018), the misleading diagnosis of "unresolved grief" and its "lack of closure," resulting from those theories, places the problem on individual weakness. The force causing the loss to remain fresh for decades later often lies in the context external to the person and not in his/her ego, psyche, or family. When a person or family suffers a loss and is locked in an uncertain situation, it becomes more likely for them to show symptoms of unresolved grief. Therefore, the pathology should be attributed to the person's situational context and environment rather than the psyche or family (p. 28). It is the disappearance of the loved one which by its nature is unresolvable, and not the family member's psyche, which makes it impossible to relinquish the lost object (p. 33). Therefore, according to Boss, the most appropriate concept that can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the experience associated with a missing individual is that of ambiguous loss.

In a similar vein, Holmes (2008, 2016) has noted that the concept of trauma is also useful for framing the experience of missing a loved one, as it describes a profoundly affecting experience that can undermine the family member's basic assumptions about their place in the world, their safety, and vulnerability (as we saw in the previous section). However, this alone cannot account for the phenomenon. Indeed, "leaving without saying goodbye" – as Boss and Yeats (2014) call it – differs from other traumatic losses because of its enduring nature and ambiguity over what has happened to the missing person and, thus, implies a different approach to PTSD. The traumatic event may be over, but it continues to haunt. Indeed, without evidence of the death, family members may experience feelings and symptoms of this loss indefinitely. They do not know whether to close the door on the missing person or keep it open for him/her to return. The grief, guilt, and other accompanying emotions do not necessarily diminish with time and may be as intense as when the disappearance occurred, as we will see in our case through Esperanza's narrative.

Thus, the ambiguous loss is a chronic trauma, and its uncertainty makes it the most stressful type of loss (Boss, 1999, 2018; Holmes, 2008, 2016). It is a unique type of loss that has psychological and physical qualities. Ambiguity coupled with loss creates a powerful barrier to coping and grieving and leads to symptoms such

as depression and relational conflict that erode human relationships. Family dynamics alter. As a result, they may cease to function in their usual roles and relationships. In this sense, the loss is not simply the death or absence of a person. The psychological family in our hearts and minds plays a central role in assessing stress and maintaining resilience. Therefore, this framing of loss, trauma, and resilience focuses on the family and makes sense of ambiguous absence and presence (Boss, 2018, pp. 27–28).

The fact that the experience of loss endures affects family members of missing persons retrospectively and prospectively. That is, looking back hurts as much as looking forward to the future. Private or public calendars lead remaining members to a permanent present, with no ability to move forward while they struggle to create a new calendar of events marked without the presence of the missing person. Events such as birthdays, their disappearance's anniversary, and Christmas are heightened reminders of their absence and can trigger repeated waves of sadness or grief. However, they can also trigger renewed determination to search (Holmes, 2016, p. 113).

Nevertheless, alongside grief over the memory of the missing member, many family members express hope in the context of recovery from ambiguous loss: of a positive outcome, of finding their family member (alive or not), of other family members being able to cope, or of the future. Indeed, Wayland et al. (2016) has found that hope, in this framework, can be a source of pain, "it is the hope that hurts." What is hoped for may change over time, but hope can also help family members avoid or delay shock and, if only temporarily, stop thinking about outcomes (Holmes, 2016, p. 115).

With the concept of ambiguous loss, we, as researchers or therapists, can broadly understand perceptions, feelings, behaviors, relationships, and symptoms of family members of the missing. It provides a framework for understanding and assessing their negative adaptations to this trauma. But it also allows us to capture the unique ways in which individuals, partners, and families of missing persons, situated in different contexts, develop healthy coping mechanisms and are resilient and how they manage to live well and find meaning, despite the stress of ambiguous loss (Boss, 2018; Holmes, 2016). For example, parents may feel incompetent or abandon their parental roles in the face of the impulse to search intensely for their loved ones. Children, for their part, may feel left behind. Couples and children are challenged to remain united in the face of the lack of clarity and conflicting emotions, which can unleash violent dynamics among them. Pain, anger, and indignation can bring them closer or drive them apart. They may recriminate each other about the reasons or lack of care that caused the disappearance, stop talking to each other, and become more isolated. They may feel guilty about participating in pleasurable activities together. In this sense, the experience of the disappearance and its reactions vary among family members (Holmes, 2016, p. 118).

Research on the effects of disappearance on family members is lacking, and if it does exist, it mainly focuses on adult family members. In fact, less is done to investigate the experiences of children and adolescents. However, some studies (Davies, 2015) have found parental concerns and stress regarding what and how to say about

the disappearance to prevent more harm to children. Several parents share the view about children's inability or lack of capacity to understand the truth. They conceal it from them. Nevertheless, Davies found that children and adolescents cope and adapt in creative and healthy ways if properly informed and supported by parents.

Similarly, other studies, which have explored adolescents living in contexts of war or violent conflict, emphasize positive aspects of adaptation (Barber, 2009a). Barber (2009b) has warned that the prevailing characterization of children and adolescents as vulnerable, incompetent, and in constant need of protection, especially in contexts of war or political violence, may result in undermining their capacity of adaptation and coping. These theoretical approaches tend to detect mainly the negative behaviors they exhibit, reinforcing a dysfunctional view of adolescents with impaired psychological functioning. According to this author, there is no evidence of such generalized dysfunctionality, and studies rather show that adolescents can function competently and seek positive forms of coping when exposed to contexts of political violence (p. 9).

To develop a more comprehensive view of resilience, however, as Kimhi and Eshel (2015) argue, it is not sufficient to merely detect negative and positive coping responses. Resilience "is neither a trait nor an outcome, and not even a process ... (it) is a state of mind that enables people to readjust and continue their lives despite traumas and adversities" (p. 181). What this suggests is that resilience is context-specific. This notion is similar to those developed by Boss (2018) and Holmes (2016), among others. In the next section, we will see how the Martinez family members developed different ways to cope, according to their specific resources, circumstances, and the support available. Among which, religion or spirituality and self-organized support groups were identified (Reyes, 2018).

The Experience of the Martinez Family Through Esperanza's Voice

The analysis of the Martinez family is based on the narrative that Esperanza, a 54-year-old mother-wife at the time of the interviews in 2021, told us about the experiences of herself; her 57-year-old husband, Luis; and her 21-year-old son, Carlos, who was 12 at the time of the disappearance of the two other boys. The two eldest sons, David and Juan, were 21 and 23, respectively, at the time of their disappearance and have not been found since then. Therefore, a large part of the family history and functioning has been sealed by this experience of ambiguous loss, including Carlos' adolescent development.

Family Context and Violence

Esperanza and her family were raised in a state where violence resulting from drug trafficking had not been unusual since the 1960s. She comes from a low-income, traditional, large (with ten children) Catholic family, as were most families in the country between the 1950s and 1970s (Esteinou, 2008). Her family provided a stable and secure home; however, violence still existed in certain contexts and within specific circles and seemed distant from her immediate domestic environment: “One could be safe if one took the necessary precautions” (Esperanza, June 6th³). Violence increased as time went on, and when she was an adult and married woman, Esperanza’s brother was murdered. Her children were young and had a close relationship with him. They were told, only superficially, some aspects of his death, because their parents thought that the truth would scare and hurt them more. This, once again, echoes the findings by Davies (2015) and Barber (2009b). During the government of former President Felipe Calderon (2006–2012), violence skyrocketed due to his ferocious war on drugs and organized crime. A large number of deaths, kidnappings, and disappearances were caused mainly by organized crime, often in complicity with police forces and the army. It is in this highly violent context when Esperanza’s two eldest sons, Juan and David, disappeared in 2012.

As a young woman, Esperanza, like many of her relatives, worked as a first responder at the Red Cross. There she met her husband. In the early years of their marriage, she cared for their children, but later she returned to work part-time as her husband had a severe accident and expenses were very high. She managed to balance family and work as her mother was an invaluable asset to care for her children while she worked. Their life elapsed between home, work, school, church, and her mother’s house. Esperanza and Luis displayed close monitoring of their two adolescents’ whereabouts, to protect them from potential dangers and problems. They were asked to call the parents regularly when they were out and let them know who their friends were. When they went to parties, they were picked up by the parents afterward. They always ensured that the children were not alone outside and warned them against the potential violence and danger. However, she and her family were not fully aware of the problem and had not heard about disappearances of people.

³For the citations and references from Esperanza’s narrative, we will use the format E (for Esperanza) and month and day of the interview. For instance, this citation would be E-06-06.

The Experience of Disappearance and the Search

On November 27, 2012, between 1:00 and 3:00 p.m., Juan and David disappeared in different but nearby places. The family learned of the incident because Luz, David's wife, informed them. The eldest son, Juan, had already completed his nursing degree and was qualified and on the outlook for a job. David was studying law, was married, and had a one-and-a-half-month-old daughter.

That day, Esperanza's mother invited the whole family to a meal at her house. Their sons were in separate vehicles. David was in his truck with his wife, their baby, and his 12-year-old brother Carlos. David took a detour because two young men phoned him to ask for help because their car had broken down. On the way, they were stopped by four or five patrol cars. They were armed, wearing uniforms and balaclavas over their heads, and were carrying high-caliber guns. They evicted all of them from the truck and took David to one of the patrol cars. They seized all their belongings and their mobile phones and pointed their guns at them. Luz, with the baby in her arms, and Carlos were paralyzed. A few moments after they left, they came back to take away David's truck. Luz, her baby, and Carlos were left on the street, where eventually a cab approached them and offered to give them a lift. Simultaneously, Juan also went missing although there was no information about his disappearance. Initially, Esperanza and Luis thought that the uniformed people were police and that both sons were in jail for a crime they might have committed. They also looked for Juan, without success. They never heard from them again, nor from the other two men who had asked for David's help. That day, a total of five young men disappeared, in different parts of the city, but in close locations.

Not knowing which authorities to turn to, Esperanza, Luis, and Luz kept searching for them in hospitals and many other places. They left Carlos and the baby with Esperanza's mother. The district law authorities did not want to file a missing person's report until 72 hours after the incident occurred. Since there was no follow-up on the case by the authorities, the family had to go to the State Human Rights Commission, where they received advice. They bought all the newspapers daily to see whether there was any information about them. Soon they found out about "dumps" where people who had been killed were "dropped." Some of them were visible; others were in pits. They went to these places pointed out by the newspapers:

We found out from the newspapers. Every day we bought all the newspapers, ... all the ones that existed, because we thought that if one did not bring anything, maybe another one would. In that search, my husband, my son Carlos, and I went. And, what we used to do was that whatever we found, we would try to open it, with a stick or something like that, to see what was inside. If we found black bags, bulky bags, we also opened them because we did not know whether someone could be in one of them. And we did not know if it was one of ours. We did that every day, every day ... We stopped taking my son Carlos because the situation became more dangerous. We realized that we were in danger ... In some places armed people took us out, and there were places where we could not enter because they were guarded. So, we decided that Carlos would no longer go, that he would not run that risk with us. He stayed with my mother. (E-06-27)

When her children disappeared, Esperanza and her family left their home and lived at her mother's house because they feared for their lives, especially Carlos's because he was a witness. They stayed there for approximately 2 years. Carlos stopped going to school for several months because his parents wanted to protect him. Then he started attending, but Esperanza and her sister took turns to take him and pick him up, and one of them stayed vigilant outside until the school day ended. Esperanza noticed that Carlos was also very afraid.

Immediately after the disappearance, Carlos was interrogated by staff from the prosecutor's office. He also told Esperanza about the incident. She kept asking him questions, trying to clarify how it happened. However, after a while, he did not want to talk anymore. He said it was like remembering it all over again, and he felt guilty because he did not do anything:

He said that at the moment when ... the patrols had taken away his brothers ... *Mamita* [i. e., mommy in Spanish], I just stood there, he said, and I did nothing ... I should have run after them ... to see where they were going ... But I stood still ... And he recriminated himself that he did not act, that he did not do what, later in his mind, he thought could have been a way to follow a path to where they would have gone ... At that moment I realized that he had that guilt ... So, I hugged him and told him that no; that on the contrary, he had done much, much, much more than a child of his age could have done ... If you had run, maybe they would have shot you, they would have shot my daughter-in-law who was also with the baby. So, you acted the best you could have done, you did well ... And I tried to tell him that so he would not feel that guilt, because it really was not his fault. (E-12-10)

Esperanza was grateful to him, and they talked a lot about it. Time went by, and the officer kept asking her questions, and she would ask Carlos again. He would tell her angrily "I told you not to ask me" until she stopped asking any more questions. Then, when she had doubts, she would talk to her daughter-in-law, and she would explain. However, there are many things they do not remember precisely.

Changes in Family Roles and Relationships

Juan and David's disappearance had a traumatic impact on the rest of the family members. As we saw in the theoretical section, family roles, relationships, and adolescent development are profoundly altered after a missing incident, and this was sadly true for the Martinezes. We will see that several outcomes pointed out in that section were experienced by them. Esperanza narrates that she stopped being a mother, a wife; she gave up everything. Both Luis and she stopped working to do the search. The first days they used Luis' car, but they had to sell it because their financial situation worsened. Their expenses increased disproportionately due to gas, meals out, and the taxis and trucks they took to search in and out of the city. They left every day, starting at 7:00 a.m. and returning at 11:00 or 12:00 p.m. Her family helped them financially, and her mother took care of Carlos.

Esperanza and Luis rarely talked about the incident, and when they did, recriminations and guilt marked the couple's communication dynamic. Luis suspected Esperanza of knowing why they had been taken away and of covering up the truth; he blamed her and demanded she tell the truth. She reproached him for his blames, lack of support, and failures in being a close father. They both felt guilty. The thought of her shortcomings as a mother constantly tormented her. She thought maybe she did not communicate effectively or properly with her sons; maybe they wanted something at some point, and she did not realize it because she was doing her own things and left them alone. For a while, both she and Luis attributed the disappearance to their children's inappropriate behavior, their incompetence as parents, or family malfunctioning. In other words, they attributed the disappearances to personal and familial rather than social causes.

The relationship between Esperanza and Luis deteriorated in the immediate years after their sons' disappearance. They argued over everything, and anything minor would trigger family conflict. Even though Carlos did not interfere, he witnessed the worsening of his parents' relationship. One day, amid a fight, Esperanza said she wanted Luis to leave the house, and Luis said that he wanted to leave as well and that he was no longer interested in anything, not even his son. Carlos overheard this; he thought it was true. Their relationship was broken for some months, but then they reestablished communication.

In Esperanza's opinion, Luis's reaction to his children's disappearance was different. She noted that, as a woman, she could channel her sadness and pain through crying or screaming, for example. However, "as happens with men, he did not express it, kept it quiet and to himself" (E-07-29). His anger for not knowing what had happened to them and why they were taken away accumulated and turned into deep hatred. He wanted to find the people who did this to his boys and to kill them. If someone committed a crime, he said that they should pay for it and that his family did not deserve to suffer. Finally, about a year and a half following the disappearance, he decided to take therapy. They both have been in therapy for many years, individually and as a couple. It has greatly helped them to restore their relationship. However, Esperanza still feels that her husband has not overcome his feeling of helplessness and sense of failure in fulfilling his responsibilities: "that the pillar of the house has not been able to find them" (E-07-29). In other words, Luis has felt incompetent in his father's role. Despite the fact that therapy has been beneficial, she has complained about their approach as they are more conventional and do not specifically address the issues of ambiguous loss.

Carlos was also profoundly affected by the disappearance of his siblings and the consequent de-structuring of family relationships. At the age of 12, he experienced a violent event as well as the mysterious and uncertain circumstances surrounding the disappearance, which left him traumatized and terrified. In addition, he engaged in the search along with his parents in different institutions and corporations and was interrogated by police authorities. From their conversations about the newspapers, he learned that lifeless people were abandoned in plastic bags in dumps or pits. He further searched for his brothers with them, sometimes taking risks in some places. These experiences repeatedly traumatized and revictimized him.

His life and family changed utterly; he was alone, frightened, and isolated and had few people to talk and turn to. He spent most of his time with his grandmother, saw little of his parents, and was afraid of what had happened. He stopped seeing his friends. After living in his grandmother's house for 2 years, the family moved back to their house. Carlos, apart from his visits to school, isolated himself from almost everyone for the timespan of 7 years, staying in his room most of the time. He clung to and treasured his siblings' belongings and wore their clothes.

When they moved out of his grandmother's house, the now 14-year-old Carlos asked Esperanza "how much longer are you going to be like this [searching]?" She replied that she would always look for them until she found them. Carlos told her: "*Mamita* [i.e., mommy], but turn to your side and look at me." Esperanza was struck with this moment of sudden realization: the fact that she was losing her only remaining son too by not giving him the attention he deserved. However, she could not give up the search. When Carlos turned 17, he had to remind his mother again: "Mommy, here I am, here I am" (E-06-27). It was then that Esperanza began to change because she understood that Carlos also needed his parents. She was worried about his behavior and isolation and became aware that he was the only one she had safe at home. She experienced hypervigilance and began to (over)protect him so that nothing would harm him. She spent less time searching, going out about three times a week to be more involved with Carlos, and tried to be there, constantly checking what he was doing:

If I saw that he did not want to leave the room and he came out, ... I asked him what happened? What are you going to do? What do you want? How can I help you? If he was going to move something, I would help him. I mean, I was very close to him, right next to him. Because... many questions came to my mind ... And he would say. Nothing, I am going to drink water. Nothing, I am going to do this ... as if nothing was happening. If he was going to wash his uniform, he would tell me, I am going to wash my uniform. I mean, nothing happens, I am going to wash my uniform ... and I would go out and I was even putting the soap and the softener so he would not struggle ... and, yes, he did his homework, his chores, but I was always on top of him, almost glued to him, as if I felt I had to be there with him. (E-07-29)

Soon they began to do the activities that they used to do before the disappearance incident such as going to the movies, church, and other places. Although he was alone and felt abandoned for many years, he does not seem to harbor any resentment toward her and her husband. They began to communicate more; they talked about everything, how he was doing in school, his desire to work, and his girlfriend, Carmen. They developed a close connection, tried to be together, and watched a movie. He would hold her hand and kiss her. Esperanza tried to make him feel that she was there. In spite of the fact that he always avoided the subject of disappearance, they managed to rebuild and deepen their relationship.

Carlos did not talk to Esperanza about his pain and what he was going through. He also refused to receive psycho-emotional therapy. He played the role of the strong male child who must support his mother. Although she tried to hide her crying, he often found her sitting on the floor weeping inconsolably. And he hugged her and tried to comfort her. Later, Carmen, his girlfriend, told Esperanza that they

talked about his feelings and cried a lot with her. Esperanza never saw him cry because he did not want to worry her, make her feel bad, or trigger painful memories.

Coping and Meaning-Making of Ambiguous Loss

In this section, we will analyze these family members' specific ways of coping with ambiguous loss and their recreation of the psychological family in their meaning-making processes. These coping strategies and meaning-making have helped Esperanza and Carlos to gradually be resilient, while Luis has faced more challenges in coping and finding positive ways to move on.

Esperanza's Process

Esperanza recounted what her loss meant:

I think that feels more than a loss ... because I have had sad losses, ... for example, of my father, my mother, my brothers, and sisters. But the disappearance is something tremendous. I think that [the word] loss falls too short. It is something shocking that destroys, tears, annihilates one totally. Not only is each person individually affected... but in this case, the mother or the wife, the whole family nucleus, everything, everything is damaged. And it is an irreparable damage, a damage that in many cases has no end ... It is a loss that not even the State recognizes, it is a repetitive loss, because in the cases where the missing people's bodies are found, families experience the loss again and sometimes their remains are not even recovered. Emotional loss has no words, it is ... literally, as many people say it and it seems a common expression, but actually ... it is to be dead in life. (E-07-29)

As we noted before, after the disappearance of her children, Esperanza and her family went to live at her mother's house. The family atmosphere was tense, distressing, disconcerting, and full of sadness. She was overwhelmed by these emotions. Various strategies helped her cope with this accumulation of emotions and make sense of the experience of ambiguous loss within her life. The first strategy was religion and spirituality. Her family and close kin began to say prayers 24 h daily. They would start the rosary and take turns praying for their children all day long:

I processed it with spirituality ... from 6 o'clock in the morning, I prayed rosaries, we prayed in groups. But I still felt so much ... that I got lost twice, I became disoriented, I began to lose my memory, I forgot many things that were important to me. I began to feel angry about music and so on, because I felt so much pain and how could I be joyful. One day when we were praying, I had a meltdown because I was in so much pain, I felt like I was going crazy. I screamed, I told [God] that I didn't want that burden anymore, because I couldn't anymore, and I was screaming and screaming, and my sisters kept praying, they left me, so he [God] listened to me. I sat in the dining room and felt a burden, like a heavy slab, and from there, my life changed. I was liberated, felt I could go on, hit rock bottom. I went to another level. I listened to many people who said, [God] give me my son as it is, and I said no, give them to me alive. Now I say, [pause] ... according to your will. I say I want them alive, but according to his will, not according to what I want. I understood that there is that superior being, that support point that allows me to continue, and that gives me a lot of strength. (E-06-27)

The quote shows not only the traumatic effects of losing her children, the crucial role of her Catholic religious beliefs especially of God's role, and her desperate demands to recover her sons alive. These initial demands overloaded and overwhelmed her with a huge emotional responsibility. She might have felt that since her desire to find her sons alive compelled her to persistently demand that God return them to her, even when her children's whereabouts were still unknown. However, her crisis helped her to finally come to acceptance of the situation and to pass on some of that responsibility/burden to God, which partially relieved her pain and suffering. Now, she had more room for her hopes and desires to develop and move on.

Engaging in a "collective," that is, a missing search group of family members, was a significant strategy to cope with ambiguous loss. It was the result of a process. First, Esperanza and her family gradually became aware that it was not attributable to their parental incompetence, inadequate family functioning, or their children's risky behavior, but rather to social factors, external to them:

In the beginning, I questioned myself, where I failed, what I did. I started to question myself as a mother, ... I felt guilty ... But then I understood ... that it had nothing to do with us as a family. That, just as it happened with them, it also happened [to] others ... that it was a phenomenon that was happening around me. As long as it did not touch me, I did not see it. I did not know that there were people who disappeared ... And later we saw that it was something very common ... The problem got bigger because they were taking many young professionals ... And we also began to realize that in the corporations there was also a lot of corruption ... Then, the little 'blindfold' began to fall from our eyes ... And we realized that both the authorities of the corporations and organized crime were involved. (E-06-27)

Members of the self-organized support group found solace, solidarity, hope, and dignity in the commune. They enabled Esperanza to feel empowered and gave meaning to her search. Hope kept them on their feet and motivated as they never knew whose missing son or relative they might find, but: "whoever is, they all search, so that a family might rest and have that peace deserved and necessary" (E-07-29). Nevertheless, the thought that her children will not be found alive sometimes assaults and consumes her. In their search over these years, she and the collective members have faced several dramatic situations and have learned what the perpetrators do to missing people. Sadly, most found are lifeless. Although she does not want to give up hope, it is not easy to maintain it. She resists thinking about this painful possibility but her mind reminds her of it. Hope, indeed, itself hurts, as Wayland et al. (2016) have noted.

Despite the fear and the risks they face, their love toward the missing is a powerful incentive to go out and search. Because "if we do not get them out, who is going to get them out, they are going to stay there!" (E-07-29). And not only do they search, but also, when a missing body is found, they become involved in the whole procedure for identification, as other studies have shown (Reyes, 2018). When a person is found dead, they are identified, a homicide investigation file is opened, and a dignified delivery is made to the family. The support group members go to the funeral or the burial and accompany the family. Therefore, the entire process, which begins with the search for the missing, makes her feel alive since

she feels what she is doing is important and meaningful. Indeed, for Esperanza, getting involved in the collective is a way to restore dignity to the missing person and his/her family and provides a positive meaning to her life in these tragic circumstances.

Esperanza also must cope with the constant pain and anguish resulting from the ambiguity of not knowing. At times, she feels on the verge of madness, as there is no room for anything but pain, sadness, and anguish. And they can last until dawn. She struggles to suppress these thoughts and tries to replace them with other beautiful memories and joyful things. Nevertheless, there are constant reminders of the ambiguous loss, and a wave of sadness and despair returns again. For example, at the last Father's Day celebration, she cried all night because her sons have missed the experience of being fathers. David has missed the opportunity to be with his daughter for 9 years, and Juan has missed the opportunity of having children. Besides blocking her thoughts and facing the challenges of anniversaries and other important dates, Esperanza uses breathing and relaxation techniques to calm herself and fall asleep.

Carlos's Process

Carlos had a different coping and meaning-making process through music and his girlfriend. As we noted earlier, after living for 2 years with his grandmother, the family moved back to their house. Upon their arrival, Carlos hardly left the house or socialized for 7 years. He had his meals and did his schoolwork in his room. However, he had a music teacher in high school who motivated him to get into music, and his mind focused on it. He made his drum set with buckets and objects to get different sounds. Music was highly beneficial as it helped distract his mind. Later, he enrolled in college to pursue a music career:

He began to study music, and that was the beginning of his life. He rehearsed until 2, 3 a.m. He listened to all kinds of music, ... studied at the university ... all genres. He experimented with music in all different genres, and practiced all the time because he did not go out. It was therapy. He chose drums. He told me, you know, mommy, when I'm angry, I play and play the drums, and I hit it and hit it until I do not feel anger anymore. (E-06-27)

With music, he took a step forward to opening up to the outside world, "he came out of his shell and began to play in groups, he began to go out a lot. His high school teacher helped him a lot, he took him to many events" (E-07-29).

In high school he also met a girl, Carmen, who is now his wife. Esperanza was thrilled to see how she encouraged him, how this love opened his heart and made him leave his room. He opened up emotionally and found a new refuge in Carmen. They talked a lot about his siblings, his relationships with them, and his pain for the loss. He started to go out with her to the park or the movies and began to make plans about his future, such as continue studying, work in music, buy a house, and get married.

Esperanza sees him as a very mature young man; he has taught her to break paradigms, to break with deep-rooted beliefs. They are affectionate for each other, make jokes, and have developed that trust that allows them to say what they feel. The development of their relationship has been crucial and beneficial for both.

The Psychological Family and Resilience in the Ambiguous Loss

Each member of the Martinezes has differently recreated their own psychological family, which plays a pivotal role in coping with ambiguous loss. As Boss (2018) has pointed out, the psychological family is more than just a collection of remembered connections, “it is an active and affective bond that helps people live with loss and trauma in the present. Cut off physically from loved ones, people cope by holding onto some private perception of home and family” (p. 78). Esperanza and Carlos have developed different ways to keep their missing members in their psycho-emotional world, which have helped them compensate for their loss and be resilient.

Esperanza, for example, has told us that she talks to Juan and David, as though they were around. By doing so, she keeps their daily presence. But also, when she communicates with them, she tells them that her search continues, despite they may be or not alive, and that she has not abandoned them. This act gives meaning to the way in which she develops her current life:

I talk to my children every day, have their pictures, and I tell them, Juan, David, let's go to the market. I'm here; I am going to take a bath; I am going to eat ... [because] even if it is in photographs, we still have them, the image is there, it is there to have communication. I feel good to see them. I have told them if you are not alive and you can make a sign I understand to rescue you. But if you see that it is not yet the time, or God believes that it is not yet the time ... But I keep going out to look for you, so they know that I keep looking for them. And I tell them that we are fine. To David, for example, I tell him if his wife and daughter come, I tell him, here is your daughter. I talk to him... But I talk to them about everything. It is healing that I have them in my memory. (E-12-10)

Esperanza also tries to keep them present by other means. As a member of the search group, she participates in some activities that recreate the memory of the missing. They make cards and lockets with their photographs and also use the age progression software to create a photograph to show how they would have aged. In her mind and heart, Esperanza's actual psychological family no longer seems to immobilize or paralyze her. She has been able to recover her relationship with Carlos and Luis. Likewise, her search, communication, and memories keep her ties with her two sons alive, allowing her to move on, despite the pain of the ambiguity of that loss.

Carlos has developed different strategies to recreate, in his mind and heart, his psychological family and reject those developed by Esperanza. She has pressured him for several years to join her in the search and see the cards, photos and data sheets, the lockets, or his brothers' current age progressions, because for her, it all makes sense, it is healing, and she considers that it will have the same effect on

Carlos. However, he has flatly refused to participate in these activities. Unlike Esperanza, it must have been excruciating and harrowing for him to see everything she shows him and follow her demands. Having experienced and witnessed highly stressful and traumatic situations for a long time, Carlos does not want to be reminded of his brothers, during and after the disappearance; any reminder about it is unbearable for him. While Esperanza's strategies build especially on her sons' disappearance to the present time, his avoidance has been crucial to shield himself from the pain and sadness and his fear to accept the possibility of their death. He has opted for a different timeline and has kept his memories and relationships with his siblings as they were before they went missing. By indicating their presence in several ways, he has gradually built resilience and been able to move on with his life.

He developed an important strategy when the family moved back to their home after living with his grandmother for 2 years. The day they arrived home, Carlos went straight to the room he shared with his oldest brother, Juan, locked himself in, took all his clothes out, and displayed them on the two beds. When Esperanza returned to the room later, she saw him asleep, but he had placed all of Juan's shirts, pants, and things all over his body. Later, she saw him put all the clothes back in the drawer where Juan kept his clothes. When she inquired the reason, he said: "Juanito likes to have all his things in order, and I am arranging them for him." Esperanza commented: "and every day, every day, sometimes even twice a day, ... he would take all out from the dresser's drawer and put everything back. Every day, every day he would go to sleep with their clothes scattered all on him" (E-06-27). Probably he wanted to keep the room and Juan's belongings ordered and ready, hoping for his return. He also started wearing his clothes, T-shirts, and tennis shoes. As David was already married and he had no clothes left in the house, Carlos used to arrange the few items David had left behind. Carlos also treasured his siblings' other items and things they gifted to him, such as an old skateboard, as he was like a son for them due to the age differences between them.

Esperanza also talked about a computer, which the three brothers used to share, but it no longer worked. A few months ago, Carlos asked her to have it back. Since then, he has spent about 15,000 pesos (about 750 US dollars) on it. Esperanza thinks it would be more reasonable for him to buy a new computer and recover the files on that old computer. There are a lot of files on that old computer, and most of them are videos of the three brothers and probably he wants to see them. However, he wants to keep it and the point of "fixing" it is to rebuild a positive psychological family. Therefore, he has bought new parts to upgrade its capacity and speed and has almost turned it into a new computer. Esperanza does not say anything to him, but she sees this as a way of saying:

This [the computer] belonged to my brothers, and I am rebuilding it ... I see him very excited; I see that he has invested in it ... like it is part of him ... And he says, I do not want to lose that computer. I am going to fix it until it is just right, he says. And I'm going to put parts in it, whatever I have to put in it ... It is like saying this is part of my brothers, it is part of me. It has a special meaning for him. (E-12-10)

With regard to Luis's experiences, we were not able to delve deeper when interviewing Esperanza. However, from her narrative, we noticed that of all the family members, he is the one with the greatest challenges in developing coping mechanisms and building a positive psychological family that can help him be resilient. Luis sometimes joins the searches carried out by the missing search group in which Esperanza participates. He contributes to the searching group using his medical knowledge to identify some of the human remains they find; he helps them with the tests they do prior to the search to assess the fields and vegetation in the places they explore; with his knowledge of the highways and roads, he supports them by giving them the coordinates of the search sites. All this has been beneficial for him as he feels useful and finds meaning.

However, there are other aspects that he experiences painfully alone. He is currently a truck operator and has told Esperanza that when he is on the road, he often sees two little birds flying on one side, and he takes this as a sign that they could be his children. He tells her that:

When he drives the truck at high speed, the two little birds go in pairs, next to the windows, on one side of him; and there go the little birds, moving like this [she moves her hands showing how], one up, one down, ... and they follow him for a good part of the road. And he always thinks it is them, and he tells me about it and then he bursts out crying, and he does cry a lot. But it works for him because he also gets something out of what he has inside. He relates that it is them and that they are probably giving him a message, that they are telling him not to give up, go on. (E-07-29)

Esperanza is aware that Luis has less resources and, hence, it is more challenging for him to face ambiguous loss. As he is not very emotionally expressive and spends a lot of time on the truck alone, he cannot share his feelings and bottles them up. However, he talks with her about his memories when he goes on a trip. He remembers, for example, that when his children were young, sometimes he would take the whole family somewhere in the truck. Those memories come back when he is alone on the road and he cries so much that sometimes he has to pull over to the side of the road and park since the tears do not let him see the road. The psychological family he recreates is still heavily grounded on pain, sadness, loneliness, and helplessness. He has not developed other meaningful activities or interests to live his life well despite the pain of the loss.

Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

The existing literature on the profound impact that missing persons have on their families yields several findings, which this study has confirmed. Based on the confirmed outcomes, this research offers some recommendations:

1. More research focused on family members' experiences of missing persons is imperative in the Mexican (and, in general, Latin American) context, to design and implement tailored services based on families' and individuals' specific needs.

2. Scholarly research, therapy, and support services, which are provided by socio-ecological and phenomenological perspectives and have the concept of ambiguous loss at their core, yield more positive outcomes and a comprehensive view of family members' experiences.
3. In the case of the Martinezes, their experiences confirm this point and can be understood within this framework, which helps prevent revictimization. Esperanza's and Carlos' coping strategies have been different, depending on their resources and specific circumstances. They show their enormous strength to face and make sense of the ambiguous loss and move on. The case of Carlos is especially relevant, given that his adolescent development took place in this tragic setting. Far from expressing pathologies or abnormalities, several of his actions and strategies allowed him to bear his loss and move on with his life. They contradict the idea of the supposed weakness and inability of children and adolescents to face difficult situations. And it was similar for Esperanza.
4. However, Esperanza's, Carlos's, and, to a lesser extent, Luis's coping and meaning-making mechanisms should not lead us to assume that they are sufficient. They have made use of the few but valuable resources at hand. But our work has shown how the family members of missing persons find themselves in a situation of great helplessness and require appropriate psycho-emotional and social support services to shore up their strengths and give meaning to their lives.

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Chapter 6

Youth Civic Engagement: A Global Perspective



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Introduction

People are the cornerstone of our world, and for our world to thrive, we need people to contribute to its development. The youth are a major segment of the world's population; however, their potential and contributions have not been fully explored. Of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that world leaders of the United Nation member states have agreed to work on, 5 had specific targets relating to youth, highlighting the importance of this age group. In particular, Goal 4 Target 4.7 described the need to provide young people with the knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development through education relating to “sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity” (United Nations, n.d.). How to develop the youth to be citizens of the world and contributing members of the global community is a challenge that needs to be addressed. One way to do this is to promote civic engagement and civic mindedness in young people. This chapter explores what it means to be civically engaged and civically minded. We also

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examine current trends and factors that foster youth civic participation and discuss future directions for research and practice.

What Is Civic Engagement and Civic Mindedness?

When people hear the word “civic engagement,” they typically think of elections and voting, because it has traditionally been linked to political participation. However, newer definitions have extended beyond the political realm (Adler & Goggin, 2005). For example, civic engagement has recently been defined as a “process in which people take collective action to address issues of public concern” (Checkoway & Aldana, 2013, p. 1894), as prosocial behaviors that benefit the youth and social institutions (Lerner, 2005), and as “a wide range of actions and behaviors that improve communities and help solve problems” (CIRCLE, 2023). In other words, “civic engagement deals with values, beliefs, attitudes, feelings, knowledge, skills and behaviours concerned with conditions outside the immediate environment of family and friends” (Amnå, 2012, p. 613). It “describes how an active citizen participates in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community’s future” (Adler & Goggin, 2005, p. 241). These broader definitions of civic engagement are more inclusive and can encompass societies that do not have democratic civic traditions, where people vote, campaign, or write to their elected officials (Flanagan & Faison, 2001; Youniss et al., 2002).

Before the youth can engage and for that engagement to be sustained, there must be the development of awareness and concern about the world and their role in it. This “inclination or disposition to be knowledgeable of and involved in the community, and to have a commitment to act upon a sense of responsibility as a member of that community” is what Bringle and Steinberg (2010) called “civic mindedness” (p. 429). In our chapter, we will use civic engagement and civic mindedness interchangeably.

Why Is Civic Engagement Important?

Research findings on the positive effects of civic engagement are quite consistent for the youth in many parts of the world. For instance, Jimenez et al. (2009) found that adolescents (aged 11–18) in Spain who reported higher levels of community participation had higher levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction. They also reported lower levels of physical and relational victimization. In a survey of over 15,000 students in the United States, Dávila and Mora (2007) found that civic engagement, such as participating in community service and student government, contributed to better academic outcomes (e.g., reading, math, science, and history). The youth who were involved also had more civic efficacy and higher civic knowledge (Schmidt et al., 2007). At the same time, they had fewer problem behaviors (Schmidt et al., 2007) and were less likely to use substances (Fredricks & Eccles,

2010). More recently, Chan and Mak (2020) surveyed college students in Hong Kong and China (average age: 20.50 years) and found that civic engagement positively increased the psychological and social outcomes of both samples. Interestingly, the positive effects of civic participation remained significant regardless of the number of hours of engagement or whether it was mandatory (Dávila & Mora, 2007; Schmidt et al., 2007).

Furthermore, civic engagement at a young age continues to exert positive influences over time. For instance, the at-risk minority youth in the United States who engaged in civic activities, such as being active in school clubs and organizations and reading the newspaper, had higher levels of educational attainment, life satisfaction, and future optimism, and they were also less likely to face arrests in emerging adulthood (Chan et al., 2014). Breadth of participation also seemed to play a role, as the longitudinal impact of participation tends to taper off after five activities (Fredricks & Eccles, 2010).

As illustrated above, civic engagement contributes to positive youth development (PYD) and helps to build social capital. The positively developed youth are *competent* and *confident*, have *character*, and are *connected* and *caring* (Damon, 2004; Lerner, 2005; Shek et al., 2019). When they have all of these developmental outcomes, the youth will make a meaningful *contribution* to society (Lerner, 2005), as well as to their families (Aslan & Tuncay, 2023). For instance, children of immigrant families in the United States reported that their immigrant parents sometimes transmit political information relating to their country of origin, and the youth also engaged in explaining about US political processes and governmental policies, hence playing a pivotal role in facilitating their parents' civic knowledge and actions (Wong & Tseng, 2008). McDevitt and Chaffee (2002) called this the "trickle-up" effect, and it is even more salient for the youth who are directly involved with political activities (Terriquez & Kwon, 2015). Therefore, the positive effects of civic engagement do not stop with the youth themselves.

From a political perspective, the active engagement of a population is also essential for the survival of democratic nations (Sherrod et al., 2002). There are numerous examples of the youth leading and participating in civic actions to address issues that are important to them. Ginwright and James (2002) observed that youth actions and involvement contributed to "better public policy, stronger organizations, more relevant services, and healthier communities" (p. 33). When the youth are involved in civic-related activities, they also become more invested in their communities and can become long-term contributors to community development (Barnett & Brennan, 2006). In this way, positive youth development is integral to positive community development (Brennan, 2008).

Trends in Youth Civic Engagement Across the Globe

Despite its positive impacts, research points to low level of civic involvement in different countries across the globe (Crocetti et al., 2014; da Silva et al., 2004; Galston, 2001; Vieno et al., 2007). Although high proportions of the world's young people

report that they are interested in social (59%) and political issues (53%) in their countries and that they would vote in national elections (81%; Schulz et al., 2010), few take action to be engaged. For example, slightly more than a third (34%) have taken part in a voluntary group to help the community, and fewer have joined a group to campaign for an issue (29%), a human rights organization (16%), or a political organization (10%; Schulz et al., 2010). Additionally, in a study of 500 Australian adolescents (aged 15 to 17 years), da Silva et al. (2004) found that only about 20% engaged in community civic responsibility (e.g., volunteer work, supporting charities) and less than 10% engaged in political civic responsibility (e.g., voting, campaigning). This was similar to the rate of participation of the Italian youth (aged 11 to 15 years; Vieno et al., 2007). These numbers are quite low overall.

Youth civic engagement also fluctuates over time. Comparing data from the 1999 International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement Civic Education Study (CIVED) and the 2009 ICCS, researchers found that civic knowledge decreased in almost half of the countries sampled (Schulz et al., 2010). Conventional civic activities also decreased in countries, such as Chile, Columbia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Greece, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovakia (Barber & Ross, 2018). Using 30 years of data from the Monitoring the Future survey, researchers also found that civic participation among high school students in the United States decreased in some areas but increased in others (Syvertsen et al., 2011). There was a stable decline in adolescent's conventional civic participation, such as writing to public officials, working in a political campaign, or voting, but there was a steady increase in youth community service. This gives a seed of hope that perhaps the youth are finding alternative ways to be involved and contribute to their communities.

Factors Shaping Youth Civic Mindedness and Engagement

Given these general trends, it is critical to understand the factors that foster civic participation in young people. One theoretical framework to understand these influences is the Relational Developmental Systems (RDS) metatheory (Lerner et al., 2014). According RDS, human development in general and civic mindedness and engagement more specifically are fostered through reciprocal and mutually influential relations between the individual and the surrounding physical, social, and cultural environments (Lerner et al., 2014). Youth development begins at home. Thus, the family system is a critical player. As the youth age, other players outside the family system become more significant. Therefore, in this section, we use the family as a focal point to look at factors within the system and those outside that influence youth civic involvement.

Familial Influences

The family is an important socialization agent and developmental context shaping youth civic engagement not only during their formative years but also later in life (Zaff et al., 2008). For example, family's discussion of news and political topics and their civic engagement promote many different civic outcomes in youths, such as national news monitoring, political knowledge, community service, and voting (Adolina et al., 2003; Rossi et al., 2016; Schulz et al., 2010). These findings have been replicated in families across the world, including Belgium (Cicognani et al., 2012), Singapore (Hong & Li, 2017), South Africa (Roman & Esau, 2015), and the United States (McIntosh et al., 2007). More frequent discussions with family about political issues also predicted stronger intention or commitment to participate in political activities when the French youth become adults (Allen & Bang, 2015). This was also found with over 2000 students (aged 14 years) across 28 countries, where having conversations or discussions about political affairs with adults at home was related to greater civic knowledge, higher appreciation of political conflict in a democracy, and greater intention to vote in the future (Campbell, 2008).

Family members foster youth engagement through indirect and direct pathways. Indirectly, the family can provide a supportive context for engagement, serve as role models, and impart prosocial values that increase the likelihood of participation (Adolina et al., 2003; McIntosh et al., 2007; Warren & Wicks, 2011). For example, a study in Germany found that children who grew up in non-intact families (e.g., divorce) were less likely to be civically involved later in life than those who grew up in intact families, even after taking into account potential differences between siblings, children's gender, maternal education, and rurality (Hener et al., 2016). The researchers posited that family intactness provides a supportive context and intangible social capital that promotes civic activities, a resource that might be limited in non-intact families.

Additional data from a longitudinal study that tracked participants from adolescence to young adulthood showed that the US youth who reported feeling a stronger bond and who did more activities with their parents reported being more civically involved later in life (Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012). Several other studies have found similar positive effects of family cohesion and youth civic engagement, including those in Ireland (Taylor et al., 2019) and the United States (Duke et al., 2009). Likewise, the youth (aged 12–17 years) in Hong Kong who came from families that are cohesive reported higher levels of interdependent self-construal (e.g., maintaining group harmony, sacrificing self-interest) and social trust (e.g., trust in others, societal fairness), all of which predicted higher sense of social responsibility (Cheng et al., 2021). It is this social responsibility value that helps to explain the relationship between familial influences and civic engagement (Maiya et al., 2022).

In addition to providing a supportive context, families can also influence youth civic engagement directly by acting as catalysts or providers of opportunities for involvement. Although parental promotion of prosocial values increased the youth prosocial values, the body of research showed that parental civic actions had a stronger effect on the youths actual civic actions than the promotion of values alone

(Roman & Esau, 2015; Silke et al., 2020; Warren & Wicks, 2011). In a study of volunteers in Turkey (aged 19–62), Aslan and Tuncay (2023) found that the social group can have a strong impact on people's volunteerism. One participant in the study reflected on how her mother arranged her volunteering and that was how she got involved. Although the study was not focused exclusively on the youth, it did point to the direct familial influences.

Moreover, Campbell (2008) concluded in his international study involving 28 countries that what parents do have a stronger effect on youth civic engagement than parental characteristics, such as their education, income, or political knowledge. Generally speaking, the youth who came from families where their parents were civically involved reported higher levels of civic responsibility and behaviors compared to their peers whose parents were not (Hart et al., 2004; Rossi et al., 2016). For the Australian youth, family civic participation explained 4% to 8% of the variance in youth community political and community civic responsibility, respectively (da Silva et al., 2004).

The family system consists of many roles or people. Different familial agents contribute to youth civic engagement in different ways. One study found that parent's volunteering had the strongest effect on youth volunteering, followed by other immediate family members (e.g., siblings) and finally by extended family members (e.g., grandparent; Grimm et al., 2005). Within the immediate family system, another study with college students in China found that the relationships with siblings positively predicted the youth civic attitudes and behaviors, while relationship with parents had no significant effects (Bi et al., 2021). This could be due to the age of the participants. The average age of the participants in Bi et al. (2021) study was 19.68 years. Parental influences might have waned during this time, and sibling influences may be stronger.

Furthermore, family factors may also interact with other factors in complex ways, and the effects may also vary across different civic domains. For instance, Fletcher et al. (2000) found that for adolescents in the rural United States, parental warmth and reinforcement of youth activities significantly predicted their civic involvement but only for those who came from families with low levels of civic engagement. One possible explanation is that parents who are involved are more likely to provide motivation and opportunities for their own children to be involved; therefore, parental civic engagement may have a stronger effect than other aspects of parenting in these families.

School Influences

Outside of the family, schools are the second context where the youth spend the majority of their time. According to data from the 2009 International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) with 38 countries around the world, over a third (39.5%; 15 countries) indicated that civic and citizenship education was a high priority in their education policy (Schulz et al., 2010). This data emphasizes the importance of preparing young people to be civically informed and engaged

members of society. Greater civic learning at school also predicted stronger intention or commitment to participate in political activities when the youth become adults and greater likelihood of the youth participating in social movements (Allen & Bang, 2015, youths in Paris). The youth not only receive direct instructions in civic education, but they may also be exposed to interactions and opportunities that promote civic engagement (CIRCLE, 2003). Additionally, the youth who attended schools where civic issues are often discussed were more likely to be involved in civic activities (Rossi et al., 2016, youths in Italy).

Similarly, having an open classroom and school climate facilitates civic development (Campbell, 2008; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). For instance, Campbell (2008) found that having an open classroom climate (e.g., teachers present multiple sides of an issue, teachers encourage students to express their opinions, students can openly disagree with their teachers on social and political issues) was related to greater civic knowledge, higher appreciation of political conflict in a democracy, and greater intention to vote in the future. The effect was significant for classroom climate at the individual student level and as an aggregate classroom level (average classroom scores). Moreover, other democratic and disciplinary classroom practices, such as students being able to help set classroom rules and teachers giving students the chance to fix what was done wrong, also influence students' civic engagement behaviors and attitudes (Jagers et al., 2017).

As for school-level factors, a stronger sense of school efficacy or the perception that students can make a change at school predicted greater likelihood of the youth participating in social movements and in unconventional political acts (Allen & Bang, 2015, youths in Paris). Similarly, students who felt that their schools treated different racial, gender, and socioeconomic groups equitably also reported more civic engagement behaviors and higher civic engagement attitudes (Jagers et al., 2017, youths in the U.S.). Schools and classrooms seemed to have a compounding and longitudinal effect on students' civic outcomes. For example, Jagers et al. (2017) found that the relationship between democratic classroom practices and civic engagement attitudes was stronger when students are in schools with more equitable climates. The relationship also remained significant a year later.

Community Influences

Besides schools, various community factors also influence civic engagement. In a study of Italian youth, Rossi et al. (2016) found that the level of social connectedness in a neighborhood, what they called "intergenerational closure," and the youth sense of attachment to their neighborhood predicted civic responsibility at the local level (e.g., improving neighborhood conditions). Moreover, social relationships with neighbors predicted competence for civic actions (e.g., organizing a public meeting). Having a strong sense of safety in one's neighborhood, trust in other people, and being able to ask others for help also positively impact involvement in community civic organizations among the youth (aged 15 years) in Canada, Italy, and Romania (Lenzi et al., 2012). Cicognani et al. (2008) found that identification

with and sense of community were significantly correlated with social participation (e.g., sports, political, religious, volunteering, etc.) among American, Iranian, and Italian youth (average ages: 19.6 to 23.4 years). The American and Irish youth who live in communities where they feel safe are surrounded by others who they can trust and have access to places to spend their free time and are more likely to participate civically than their peers who did not live in such communities (Brennan et al., 2009). Overall, these studies illustrated that the quality of life in a community matters, as well as how the youth feel about their physical and social environments.

Sociocultural Influences

The diverse trends in youth civic engagement may also be due to larger political and cultural variations. The political system and civic culture of a particular country (Sanchez-Jankowski, 2002; Stadelmann-Steffen & Freitag, 2011), as well as the societal perception of the youth (Sapiro, 2004), exert macro-level influences that drive the youth preferences and opportunities for participation. For instance, many countries in Europe and North America have strong civic traditions, including the involvement of the youth in civic activities (Lenzi et al., 2012). England, for example, has embedded volunteering and social participation in the country's social policies. Italy also shared a similar orientation; however, activities are mostly channeled through church-based institutions. Romania and other postcommunist countries had a slightly different path of development. People were generally forced to participate in state organizations under the communist regimes. As these countries transition to the postcommunist era, there is hesitancy to participate in civic activities, although this is slowly changing (Lenzi et al., 2012).

Relatedly, young people living in countries where voting is compulsory will most likely exhibit different levels of civic engagement than those who do not, simply by virtue of the existing structure that supports or encourages such activities. There are currently over 20 countries, where such laws exist (e.g., Argentina, Samoa; IDEA, 2023). Additionally, researchers have also identified a connection between a country's civic knowledge score and its Human Development Index (HDI). Countries with high HDI scores were also more likely to have students scoring high on civic knowledge (Schulz et al., 2010). HDI assesses healthy life, access to knowledge, and standard of living; thus, countries measuring high in these domains may put more emphasis and provide more civic education opportunities for their students.

Societal perception of the youth and the valuation of their participation also play a role in shaping youth civic engagement. Historically, the youth have been viewed by society as problems to be fixed and rarely are they considered contributors to society (Cahn & Gray, 2005). Therefore, they are often overlooked, and their participation in civic activities is typically not sought after. Lebanon provides an interesting and illustrative case example of this. After undergoing over a decade of civil war (1975–1990), the country continued to face numerous political, social, and economic challenges (Fakhoury, 2016). The youth comprised a major part of the

Lebanese population, and they also encountered significant struggles with a disparaging educational system and other economic and social inequities, but their voices were not being heard. The youth began organizing and advocating for a seat at the table and to be represented in the national policy formation process. With the support of various international actors, such as the European Union, the United Nations, and the World Bank, the Lebanese government began to implement several youth-centered projects to integrate the youth needs and voices into the national agenda. They also proposed amendments to existing laws that prohibit or restrict youth participation in political and economic processes. Lebanon is a positive case, but in many parts of the world, the youth voices and participation are still ignored or discouraged.

Broadly speaking, the culture in which the youth are embedded can also shape preferences in terms of civic activities. For instance, while volunteering activities were the most common type of civic activities reported by the American youth, engagement in conversations with others about community issues was most common among Italian youth and involvement in cultural activities and associations for Iranian youth (Cicognani et al., 2008). Researchers posited that perhaps, the youth from individualistic countries, which emphasize personal achievements and contributions, may gravitate more toward individual acts of volunteerism, and those from collectivistic societies, which value communal activities, may choose to engage in conversations with others or cultural activities (Jahromi et al., 2012). Related to this is the youth subculture, which may give preference to certain civic activities. Traditional civic activities such as reading the newspaper and voting might not be appealing or available to young people. For instance, Tan et al. (2011) found that young people in Singapore are more politically active online than older people and consume more political content online than through traditional mediums.

Finally, the family, school, and community factors we described above may interact or manifest differently across different sociocultural environments. For instance, Pavlova et al. (2016) found that positive parenting may not influence civic engagement in ways that we typically expect, especially for the youth in Finland. Analyzing the EduFin data, the researchers found that higher maternal warmth and support and stronger identification with the family in adolescence (aged 16–18) predicted lower political activism (e.g., boycotting, demonstration, petitioning) in early adulthood (up to 10 years later), even after controlling for prior civic involvement and other sociodemographic factors. This could be due to parents promoting more benign civic activities (e.g., volunteering) over more confrontational types of activities (e.g., political activism). Interviews with women activists in the United States provide some support for this (Wang et al., 2021). The women recounted a contentious past with their parents, who objected or were resistant toward their youth activism. The American parents were against civic activities that distracted children for their educational pursuit.

However, Pavlova et al. (2016) think for Finland, it is less likely about the parents' preference and more likely about the children's values (Pavlova et al., 2016). The Finnish youth in their study who reported stronger identification with their families also reported lower value of self-direction (autonomy of thoughts and actions) and higher value of conformity (compliance with social expectations),

which could be why they are not as active in political activities, which typically require the youth to challenge social norms (Pavlova et al., 2016). Note that the youth in Pavlova et al. (2016) study and those in Cheng et al. (2021) exhibited similar types of values from being close to their families, but each group took a slightly different path or trajectory: one group was less likely to be civically engaged, and the other had a higher sense of social responsibility, respectively. Granted that the studies examined two different civic domains (i.e., civic engagement vs. sense of social responsibility), the findings do highlight the potential influences of cultural context. Pavlova et al. (2016) explained that Finland does not place a heavy emphasis on family relationships. That does not mean that family is not important; however, the youth do not have to sacrifice their personal pursuits for the sake of the family. Additionally, social problems in Finland are handled by the state or state institutions, and there are fewer opportunities for individuals to be involved. Therefore, family may influence youth civic mindedness and civic engagement differently than in China, where interdependence and family relationships are prioritized and there might be more opportunities to be involved.

The interplay between family, school, community, and sociocultural factors can be challenging to tweeze apart. Although we did not cover individual factors, such as the influence of age (Eckstein et al., 2013; Vieno et al., 2007) and gender (Allen & Bang, 2015; Eckstein et al., 2013), in this chapter, they also shape youth civic engagement. Examining all of these levels of influences requires complex research designs and can be resource-intensive to conduct, but it is possible to do. In fact, some studies are beginning to adopt a more systemic view in their investigation of youth civic engagement (Lenzi et al., 2012; Rossi et al., 2016).

Strategies for Effective Youth Engagement

Efforts and initiatives to increase civic engagement among youth are growing worldwide. However, much remains to be done, and this work is more challenging in sociopolitical contexts that do not encourage civic participation. As we understand the factors that promote civic involvement, we can work to foster youth engagement. At the same time, we must also focus on removing existing barriers. At such a critical age, family and school remain significant settings to develop civic engagement among the youth; thus, improving civic education within schools and being intentional in involving parents and families in the process are important. As traditional forms of civic engagement become less appealing to the younger generation, we also need to explore alternative pathways to participation. Lastly, we need to also gain a good understanding of destructive forms of civic engagement and address systemic mechanisms that lead to such activities to channel the youth into more productive and meaningful participation.

Removing Barriers in Youth Civic Engagement

In examining the factors that facilitate civic engagement among the youth, we need a good understanding of the barriers that prevent their involvement. One of the biggest challenges is the negative perception toward the youth, where they are viewed as juveniles lacking in skills, knowledge, and judgment to participate in civic life (Camino & Zeldin, 2002). This may be true in some sense, as the youth cover a wide age range, spanning from childhood to emerging adulthood. We cannot expect a 10-year-old to perform at the level of an 18-year-old, and both may lack some life experience compared to an adult. However, Osler and Starkey (2005) made the case that we need to treat the youth as citizens now rather than “citizens-in-waiting.” There are numerous examples of the youth taking action to solve problems or improve their community (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Lee & Chan, 2016; Suwana, 2020) showing that they are concerned about the well-being of others and can make a difference. The gap in knowledge and skills can be addressed through education and programing, especially those that are facilitated by adult-youth partnerships (Camino & Zeldin, 2002). One example is the Model United Nation programs (see Levy, 2016). Each society has the responsibility of creating the necessary structure and establishing an environment where the youth can meaningfully participate based on their capabilities and skills (Sapiro, 2004).

Improving Civic Education in Schools

Because of their age, schools serve as important settings to foster civic engagement among the youth (CIRCLE, 2003). We see that although participation in civic activities outside of school is generally low, the proportions of the youth engaging in school-based civic activities are much higher. For example, 40% of the youth across 38 countries had taken part in decision-making about how the school is run, 42% had served as a class representative or school parliament, and 76% indicated that they had voted for a class representative of school parliament (Schulz et al., 2010). Schools are also important places for students to learn civic content and gain the skills to participate as a member of their community. Many books and articles have been written on how to improve civic education in schools (e.g., Broom, 2017; Torney-Purta et al., 1999). We will emphasize a few of these recommendations as they are related to youth civic engagement from a global perspective.

First, civic engagement looks different across individuals and contexts; therefore, civic education needs to be tailored to certain groups, depending on their values and motivations. For example, Torres Irribarra and Carrasco (2021) conducted multigroup latent class modeling of the 2016 ICCS data from 24 countries and identified several types of the youth. Those who are *comprehensive* tend to value an array of civic activities from voting to helping the local community and participating in peaceful protests. The youth who are *socially engaged* focused less on political participation and more on following the law, protecting the environment, and

helping the community. Other typologies included monitorial, duty-based, and anomic youth. Lesson plans that solely focus on politics and government will not engage all students. Of particular interest are the *anomic* youth who place very low value on all of the civic indicators. More research is needed to explore the reasoning behind their lack of concerns, before effective civic education can be developed to address their needs. In her research with the Ukrainian youth, Tereshchenko (2013) found that young people are not particularly interested in civic lessons that involve rote memorization and passive listening. Rather, they prefer to learn more about the problems in their local communities and to have a space to put democracy into practice. Therefore, she called for more place-based and youth-centered civic education to meet the needs of students.

Although it is important to improve students' civic knowledge (Schulz et al., 2010), it is also worth noting that in some cases, high levels of civic knowledge in the youth reduce their electoral or political participation in adulthood (Schulz et al., 2010). It is probably because the more they know, the more disenchanting they are with the political process (Schulz et al., 2010). This is particularly true among the marginalized youth, who often feel that governmental systems are often run by the ruling elites, who do not serve their interests. Moreover, the (democratic) ideals, such as justice and equality, being preached in schools and elsewhere do not reflect their lived experiences of discrimination and exclusion (Rubin, 2007; Rubin & Hayes, 2010). In these cases, it is important to implement programs to teach the youth how they could make a change to institutions and processes to generate a sense of empowerment and hope rather than disenfranchisement and defeat. One way to do this, according to Rubin (2007), is to honestly explore and identify what she called *disjunctures* or mismatches between ideals preached and reality lived and to be given the opportunity to critique aspects of government or civic life that are not working.

Second, most civic education curricula are centered around the individual nation state. As our world becomes more globalized due to increased international exchanges, we also need to prepare young people to be a member of this global society (Kennedy, 2012). Scholars such as Osler and Starkey (2005) have called for the development of *cosmopolitan citizens*, who value both their national and global membership. In a cross-national study, data indicated that only 26.3% of countries placed a strong emphasis on global and international organizations in their civic education curricula (Schulz et al., 2010) and about a third (36%) of young people around the world indicated that they were interested in international politics (Schulz et al., 2010).

Third, teacher education and training are important parts of the civic education equation. Among teachers in an international sample, slightly more than a third felt that promoting knowledge of social, political, and civic institutions was an important goal for civic and citizenship education, with smaller percentages considered promoting students' participation in the local community (16%) and thought preparing students for future political participation were important goals for civic and citizenship education (7%; Schulz et al., 2010). In the CIVED study, 65.8% of the countries did not provide any preservice training for civic and citizenship education to teachers, and 57.9% did not provide any in-service training (Schulz et al., 2010).

These percentages point to the need to improve the training of in-service teachers and the ongoing development of those already in the field.

Another important aspect of improving education is the need to conduct ongoing evaluation of existing and new efforts to gauge whether they are effective. Using standardized evaluation tools can help facilitate cross context comparisons; yet currently these tools are rare to find. One example was the Civic Interactions Motivating DiVerse Individuals in Classroom Settings (CIVVICS; Stolte et al., 2014). It is a tool to observe civic learning and processes in the classroom. Teachers and evaluators rate (e.g., low, medium, high) the purpose and goals of the lesson plans and classroom implementation, the relationships and interactions in the classroom, student engagement, and whether classroom practices reflect democratic ideas (e.g., civic empowerment). Tools such as these will help educators reflect on their curricular content and classroom processes to improve the delivery of civic education. These tools need to be tested internationally to assess their relevance and validity in different settings. Moreover, assessment and evaluation are important overall to identify areas for improvement to make best use of existing resources and time.

Promoting Civic Education Through Partnerships

Civic education is not only a responsibility of schools. The family and the community also play a major role in promoting youth civic mindedness and engagement. When all three entities join forces, their impact can be much wider in scope and stronger in effectiveness. Epstein (2011) outlined six types of school-family-community partnerships, including parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with community. For example, communicating means designing and conducting effective forms of two-way communications about school programs and children's progress, and volunteering involves recruiting and organizing help and support at school, at home, or in other locations to support the school and students' activities. Waluyandi et al. (2020) suggested that parents can support civic education by reinforcing learning at home and also by collaborating with teachers and being involved in the schools. This involvement can be seen as a form of civic participation and provide good modeling/scaffolding for children and the youth.

The strength of connection and the type of collaboration as well as the barriers that hinder partnership-building among these three entities varied across cultural and national contexts. In places such as Indonesia, schools are often seen as the authority, and there was no established tradition of parental involvement within the school systems; therefore, guidance and resources dedicated to building and sustaining these partnerships are often limited (Jatmika et al., 2020). Educators may be resistant to reaching out to parents, and parents may feel that they do not have the capability or time to participate (Yulianti et al., 2019). Despite these barriers, intentional and well-designed programs and practices can be helpful in bridging these gaps (see Sanders & Epstein, 1998). More research is needed to gain a better understanding of what type of school-family-community partnerships is effective across

different contexts and increase the dissemination or sharing of best practices more globally.

Exploring Alternative Forms of Civic Participation

Although researchers lamented the decline in youth civic participation, others argued that it is undergoing a transformation (Banaji, 2008; Checkoway, 2012). As traditional forms of civic activities decline, new ones emerge, including cause-based and digital activism (Tereshchenko, 2013). The youth are no longer waiting till local or national elections to get involved. They are passionate about working for different causes, such as addressing human rights violations or protecting animals and the environment. Digital activism involves using digital media and network infrastructure to conduct advocacy and activism (Sivitanides & Shah, 2011). Platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and many more, have been used to communicate, connect, and call people to action, particularly young people (Suwana, 2020). In fact, many powerful social and political movements have been facilitated by digital activism, such as the Save KPK (Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi/Corruption Eradication Commission) Movement in Indonesia (Suwana, 2020), the Occupy Movement in the United States and the Indignados Movement in Spain (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), as well as the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong (Lee & Chan, 2016). The youth are digital natives, and they are comfortable using these platforms to voice their concerns and take action.

Innovative solutions involving the integration of different program areas and curricula are also on the rise. The Youth Start Social Entrepreneurship Program for Kids (Pinho et al., 2019) is a good demonstration of how civic education can be weaved together with youth entrepreneurship to make the program more relevant and interesting to students. The integration helps the youth understand the importance of being civically engaged but also how to use the entrepreneurial process to come up with creative solutions to improve their communities.

Examining Destructive Civic Engagement

Lastly, we typically focus on positive civic engagement, but civic engagement falls on a spectrum of activities. Whether it is negative or positive depends on the context and who is evaluating the action. Take for instance, youth protests may be seen as positive civic behaviors in the eyes of activists who want to bring a change to the current political system; however, to autocratic and authoritarian governments, youth protests may be seen as an act of insurrection. Therefore, civic educators sometimes have to straddle the murky water of the sociopolitical climate that they are operating under.

Nevertheless, there are also instances of clear destructive civic activities, such as terrorism and extreme forms of political violence, that we also need to pay attention

to. Research shows that there are certain conditions that increase the emergence of these behaviors. In particular, the potent mixture of low socioeconomic background, lack of knowledge about government, and a strong desire to participate in community actions make the youth in child-saturated communities vulnerable to exploitation from groups that want to mass mobilize for their own gains (Hart et al., 2004). These communities with high proportions of children and the youth often lack appropriate adult role models (Atkins & Hart, 2003; McIntosh & Munoz, 2009). Living in economically restrictive conditions, with high unemployment rates and few career opportunities, also makes the youth more likely to take risks to obtain immediate rewards (Apolte & Gerling, 2018). Therefore, we need to be aware and to continue working on addressing these systemic and structural issues to give the youth meaningful activities to engage in, so that they do not fall into desperation and struggle for survival. Governments around the world should focus on generating jobs and career opportunities for young people to spend their time more constructively. Also, societies with higher proportions of young people could benefit from targeted mentoring to show young people productive ways to contribute to society.

Increasing International and Cross-Cultural Research

We need to also increase research on youth civic engagement around the world. Currently, the existing body of literature is dominated by studies from the West or industrialized nations. The field could benefit from studies situated in other parts of the world, particularly cross-national or cross-cultural studies to compare similarities and differences across contexts. Particularly lacking are studies focusing on familial and cultural influences. Therefore, more research is needed to understand the mechanisms by which families, schools, and communities shape the youth civic mindedness and engagement. Youth civic engagement provides ground for fruitful collaborations among many different disciplines, including developmental psychology, political science, education, cultural studies, and family studies just to name a few. As this body of research grows, we can then begin to develop relevant theories about how these mechanisms or processes work and test these theories across different settings or locales.

Conclusions

Young people are an important segment of the population, and they have a role to play in society. Their participation in civic life, when started at an early age, will give them the knowledge and skills necessary to be problem-solvers and leaders of tomorrow. There are a promising future and many untapped areas when it comes to the education and socialization of the youth in civic engagement. When community members, families, schools, and social institutions come together to intentionally promote youth civic engagement, the effort will benefit all involved.

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Part III
Adolescents and Families in the Context
of Stress and Strain

Chapter 7

Stress, Crisis, and Trauma for Brazilian Youth and Their Families



Bruna Larissa Seibel, Tyele Goulart Peres, Raysa Schmitz Serafim,
and Cody Stonewall Hollist

Introduction

Emotional tension is part of the developmental tasks adolescents face. Physical changes brought on by puberty coupled with the cognitive growth and development of the frontal cortex create a context of curiosity about self, but that is often coupled with worry. This tension propels adolescents on the quest to figure out their identity. The ability to think abstractly is a critical part of seeking an answer to the question “Who am I?”. The changes brought on by puberty also awaken a range of emotions that the adolescent has previously not had to manage. Chaotic experiences can exacerbate an already complex time of cognitive development, management of a new range of emotions, and physical changes.

Before we talk about the impact stress, crisis, and trauma have on adolescent development in Brazil, let’s define each. *Stress* is a state of worry caused by difficult situations or the perception of difficulty. It can be acute or chronic depending on the context causing the worry. Acute stress can be the result of an isolated incident like forgetting a homework assignment. It can also be chronic like living in an unsafe neighborhood. The growing capacity during adolescence for abstract thinking that enables identity development also creates an increased capacity for worry and

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stress. Because of this ability, stress and worry can also be about things that haven't and are unlikely to happen, like being abandoned by good friends. An adolescent may have good friends who have demonstrated their support during difficult times, and because of how valuable that support was, they may worry about losing their friendship. Stress and worry during this time are not always the result of a tangible problem.

Individuals experience a *crisis* when they do not have the coping mechanisms needed to handle an event that they perceive to be harmful which leads to significant cognitive and emotional distress. Because this is rooted in the individual's capacity to manage the situation, a crisis to one person may not be a crisis to another. There are however experiences that are known to have a negative impact on child and adolescent development. Research has identified ten such categories and labeled them adverse childhood experiences or, more informally, ACEs (Felitti et al., 1998). These ten categories have long-term impacts on children and adolescents. Support from friends and family is critical in determining if these experiences would be categorized by the individual as a crisis or as a traumatic event.

Van der Kolk (2014) describes that *trauma* is an event that overwhelms the nervous system in a way that imprints the experience in the body and mind and alters the way we process and recall that memory. As such, there are long-term implications of those experiences that have an impact on future functioning in a wide range of severities. The impact of these experiences can lead to mental illness and long-term challenges.

Mental illness among children is most often a result of maltreatment like abuse and neglect or biology like some cases of ADHD (Lippard & Nemeroff, 2020). However, mental health etiology shifts significantly during adolescence to become multifaceted, much like that for adults. Abstract thought and puberty bring an awakening of physical and emotional complexity. This emotional complexity can then exacerbate the impact of stress, crisis, and trauma.

To structure our discussion, we will use the bioecological theory of human development (BTHD) which suggests that human development is grounded on the reciprocal interactions of the person with his/her context throughout the life span (Bronfenbrenner, 1996, 2004; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). It proposes a model based on four interrelated dimensions: Process, Person, Context, and Time.

The Process addresses the dynamics of the person's interaction with other people, objects, and symbols. This is a critical dimension of the model since these are understood as the drivers of human development. The Person is seen as an active being, seen both from his or her biopsychological characteristics and from those built through interaction with the environment. Context is defined as an interaction of four different environmental, physical, and social levels: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The microsystem refers to the processes and structures that occur in a person's immediate environment. The family, for example, is considered a microsystem for each of its members. The mesosystem involves the connections between two or more microsystems, for example, the influences of the family on the school. The exosystem corresponds to indirect influences that external microsystems have on the individual, such as a parent's job. The macrosystem,

meanwhile, is perceived as the social institutions common to a culture or subculture, such as the laws or the political system. Finally, the Time dimension allows the analysis of changes and continuities throughout the life cycle. Time has several aspects but fundamentally relates to the developmental process that must occur over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1996, 2004; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

The bioecological understanding, especially in vulnerable situations, allows investigating development in context, considering that adverse conditions are not uni-causal. Research in context enables the detection of risk factors and enriches the perspective of protective factors, which facilitates the development of interventions that are coherent with the context (Lordello & de Oliveira, 2012).

Brazilian Macrosystem: Cultural, Structural, and Political Context

As described above, the macrosystem is made up of the social institutions common to a culture. We are going to highlight two important aspects of the macrosystem in Brazil, the cultural aspect (the centrality of family in Brazil and the culture of connection) and the structural aspect (governmental and structural contexts).

Brazil is one of the world's largest countries in terms of land mass and the largest in the Southern Hemisphere. Brazil has more than 203 million inhabitants, and the southeast region is home to at least 41% of this population. The country is divided into 26 states and the Federal District IBGE (or Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, 2023a). Currently, the country has the 12th largest economy in the world and has a human development index of 0.754 (PNUD, 2022). Due to its geographic size, Brazil has great differences in geographical and climatic characteristics. It also has significant sociodemographic and economic differences between regions.

Some data indicate that at least 99% of the population has access to electricity; however, access to drinking water and sewage is lower, 85% and 65%, respectively (IBGE, 2020). Regarding inequality related to skin color, the numbers are even more significant. In 2021, around 72.9% of the population living below the poverty line (less than US\$5.50/day) identified as black or brown. In 2021, the average monthly income of white employed persons was BR\$3099, while that of black people was almost half (BR\$1764). These differences have been consistent over the past 10 years (IBGE, 2019).

Inequality with access to education intensified with the COVID-19 pandemic. Children and adolescents aged 6–17 who did not receive school activities in 2020 were 13.5% black and 15.2% brown, against only 6.8% of white (UNICEF, 2021). Gender inequality is also an important factor in Brazil; while the average monthly income of men in 2012 was BR\$2744, that of women was BR\$2016, a difference that remains despite the change in current earnings. In 2019, for example, men had an average monthly income 28.7% higher than women (IBGE, 2023a).

The Centrality of Family in Brazil

The family plays a particularly key role in the culture and organization of Brazilian society. Family members connect in profound ways, and their relationships are extremely important in the constitution of individuals from childhood to death. The actions and behaviors of a member, therefore, can impact the entire family system. Interdependence among family members is highly valued. Although some members take on the role of providing emotional and financial support, family members are expected to come together to help each other achieve financial stability and overcome challenges. So, providing for the family does not mean just providing food, but it also means providing security and support for that family system.

Many generations often live in very close proximity due to environmental, economic, and political factors that give them access to complementary networks. Contrary to what happens in some independent cultures, where the transition to independence can occur at a younger age, in Brazil, the transition into adulthood is experienced differently. Many young Brazilians choose to continue living with their families even after starting their studies or entering the job market. This reality reflects a series of factors, which include the importance of the family as a unit of emotional and financial support, as previously mentioned. In Brazil, it is common for parents to support their adult children, both emotionally and financially.

It is important to mention that Brazilian families are not seen only from the perspective of the nuclear family (parents and children) but in the composition of other members such as grandparents, uncles, cousins, and even friends chosen and treated as “part of the family.” In that sense, it is quite common in the Brazilian family composition that there is multigenerational coexistence, where members of different generations live in the same residence. This arrangement promotes strong ties with previous generations and family traditions, in addition to promoting a sense of continuity.

In this coexistence, matriarchs can be highlighted in the family structure of Brazilians. Matriarchs are known as older women, grandmothers, mothers, or aunts who play a significant role in family decisions and the maintenance/cohesion of this system. The matriarch is often seen as the emotional and moral compass of the family. She provides guidance and leadership, offering advice and support to other family members, particularly during important decisions or challenging times. Her opinions and perspectives hold weight and are highly valued. It is also expected the matriarch keeps family traditions, customs, and cultural heritage. She passes down family stories, rituals, and values from one generation to the next, ensuring the preservation of the family’s identity and history. The matriarch’s role in upholding and transmitting cultural practices is highly regarded and respected. Her efforts contribute to nurturing family bonds and strengthening intergenerational ties.

When families function in this way, they become an important protective factor against the impact of crises and trauma on adolescent development. However, it is obvious that not all families will function in the way we have just described. When families are not healthy, the expectations of supporting the family can be a difficult

barrier to adolescents who are trying to get out of unhealthy environments. Just like on the healthy side, it is a great protective factor; when it is unhealthy, those dynamics can be a significant risk factor. As such, the family's health has a significant impact on adolescent development.

The Culture of Connections

*“Ô! Esse coqueiro que dá coco
Onde eu amarro a minha rede
Nas noites claras de luar
Brasil! Brasil!
Ô! Estas fontes murmurantes
Onde eu mato a minha sede
E onde a Lua vem brincar
Ô! Esse Brasil lindo e trigueiro
É o meu Brasil brasileiro
Terra de samba e pandeiro
Brasil! Brasil! Pra mim! Pra mim!”*
(Aquarela do Brasil – Watercolor of Brazil – written by Ary Barroso in 1939)

Brazilians are known for their warmth and affectionate nature. Within families, physical touch, hugs, and kisses are common ways of expressing love and care. Family members often demonstrate genuine warmth toward one another, creating an environment of emotional closeness and support. This connection culture encourages strong support networks. In addition, an important aspect of the connection culture present in Brazilian society is the way people celebrate; family gatherings for birthdays, holidays, and special events are common. These celebrations are marked by joy, music, dancing, and shared experiences, strengthening the bonds between family members and creating memories.

The connection in Brazilian families reflects the importance of emotional support, shared experiences, and strong interpersonal relationships. These values contribute to the resilience of families, creating a nurturing environment where individuals feel loved and supported in times of stress and crisis (Seibel & Koller, 2015).

Now that we already know a little about the importance of family and connection in Brazilian society, we need to address how the policy of protection, provision of health services, and education works.

Governmental and Structure Context

In the 1980s, the movement to defend the rights of children and adolescents gained strength, including children as a national priority in the Federal Constitution of 1988 (Brasil, 1988; UNICEF, 2023); in that constitution, the unified health system

was created in Brazil. The Brazilian healthcare system, known as the “Sistema Unico de Saude” (SUS), plays an especially significant role in providing support for children and adolescents. It provides comprehensive healthcare services for Brazilian citizens and immigrants. This is the primary professional mechanism for treatment of clinical distress from stress and crisis. It is the responsibility of SUS to offer policies that promote healthy development involving pregnant women, parturient, newborns, children, and adolescents (Brasil, 2014). The health of mothers and children has become a focus since the indicators of mortality were also the launch of the WHO millennium goals (WHO, 2018), and Brazil declared a commitment to eradicate maternal and child mortality. In the year 1990, the infant mortality rate was 47/1000, decreasing dramatically to 13/1000 in 2015 (Brasil, 2021). Along with this, policies aimed at the development of Brazilian children and adolescents are related to humanized care, violence prevention, and prevention of chronic diseases and preventable causes.

According to the 2019 National Health Survey, about 71.5% of people are dependent exclusively on SUS (IBGE, 2019). To this end, the SUS is designed to provide intersectoral connection to promote not just health but also well-being. This was done in response to the impact of trauma as the health and disease process of these young people may be related to situations of violence.

Health officials know that stress crisis and mental health can have an impact on physical health and as such they have policies that promote adolescent healthy development. Through the “Rede de Atenção Psicossocial” (RAPS, or Psychosocial Care Network), SUS is tasked with providing psychological care to all populations including mental illness and drug addiction. RAPS has additional responsibility to provide support for vulnerable groups, and adolescents are listed as one of those groups.

Table 7.1 shows different services to support prevention and treatment of issues related to stress, crisis, and trauma.

All these services work in an articulated way so that children and adolescents are included in the care system, whether for health, psychosocial, or protection care.

The first to flag concerns about an adolescent experiencing stress and crisis is often the school system. The health and education systems are so intertwined in Brazil that the first ministry created to deal with them, in 1930, was the “Ministério dos Negócios da Educação e Saúde Pública” (or Ministry of Education and Public Health Affairs, Brasil, 1930). Until that point, only the portion of the population with greater socioeconomic power had access to education and, in many cases, sufficient healthcare. That lack of access to education and health in Brazil left children and adolescents with lower socioeconomic status on the margins of society with little hope of change.

Industrialization and urbanization led to a “Manifesto of the Pioneers of New Education,” which proposed a public, free, compulsory, and lay school system for all Brazilians up to the age of 18. The document proposed a reconstruction of a less elitist educational system to meet the needs of the emerging industrialization of Brazil (INEP, 1984). In 1934, it was constitutionally defined that education was the right of all Brazilians. Then in 1962, the first national education plan was launched, with the aim of establishing a set of goals to be met within 8 years.

Table 7.1 Actions and services related to children and adolescents in Brazil

Service	How it works
Unidade Básica de Saúde e Estratégia de Saúde da Família (Basic health units and family health strategy)	These units closely monitor Brazilian families and are located within the community. They have direct contact with schools and other community support
Consultório de Rua (Street clinics)	This service aims to provide support for vulnerable populations, such as individuals experiencing homelessness. The street clinic is a modality that promotes the connection of adolescents with other services
<i>Centro de Atenção Psicossocial (CAPS)</i> (Psychosocial care center)	Psychosocial care center work takes place through multidisciplinary teams such as psychologists, doctors, and social workers, strategically organized. CAPS work as a form of welcoming, bonding, and monitoring and is divided into several types depending on the scope of services being provided and size of the municipality. In cities with more than 200,000 inhabitants, CAPS teams are equipped with personnel specializing in substance use and treatment of adolescents
Temporary host units	Spaces dedicated to providing temporary crisis support operate 24 hours a day to protect children, adolescents, and adults with severe social or family problems. Children and adolescents can be accommodated for up to 6 months in these residences to protect them from harmful environments and reinforce social and community engagement

The Brazilian educational system is divided into basic early childhood education (children up to 5 years old), basic education (from 6 to 14 years old), secondary education (from 15 to 17 years old), and graduate/university education. The constitution established that all families have free access to these services. The Federal Ministry of Education has the responsibility to organize, finance, and create policies for Brazil's educational system. Services are managed at a local level, and when resources are scarce, it can impact on the availability of these services.

A crucial point to be mentioned is the difference between public and private education. Data from the school census released in 2022 (INEP, 2023) shows that 49% of students are enrolled in basic education at municipal public schools, 31.2% are enrolled at state funded public schools, and 19% are in private schools. Overall, 99.7% of the population aged 6–14 attend school. Although municipal public schools have the highest percentage of students, they have the lowest resources. For example, 66.8% of private schools have a computer available for students, while in municipal public schools, it is only 39.4% (INEP, 2023).

Regarding secondary education, around 95% of students aged 15–17 attend school. The state public school is the main responsible for secondary education in the country (84.2% of students); the private school has 12.3% and the federal public schools have about 3%. The school dropout rate is a problem that progressively increases from the fourth year of elementary school (dropout rate, 1.3) to the first year of high school (dropout rate, 7.9). In addition, the highest repetition rate is found in the first year of high school (12.7) (INEP, 2023).

These trends are important because they represent systems designed to support adolescent development. The largest percentage of students are enrolled in schools

with the lowest resources. In addition, public schools are places that must be within the child and adolescent protection network, working with families and with the health system. Since schools accompany the development of adolescents, they are an important player in protecting and promoting mental health in the country.

Exosystems: Brazilian Institutions and Their Influences on Adolescence

Adolescent development and health response to stress and crises is tied to the quality of their contexts. As described above, the school environment is seen as the place responsible for continuing the educational process of children and adolescents. The expectations created around the school environment, however, do not match the depreciation of the role of teacher. Historically, teachers have not received financial recognition in recent years and have been losing authority. The often precarious working conditions, added to the exhausting routine, increase in responsibilities, and the contemporary challenges have a serious impact on educators' health. Moreover, Brazilian education is often consolidated on rigid foundations, considering the educational process as a linear transmission of knowledge and failing to keep up with social and students' changes (Guzzo et al., 2016). Also, the social and structural characteristics of schools play an essential role in shaping physiological and psychological well-being from adolescence through young adulthood (Boen et al., 2020).

In contexts of vulnerability, where public schools are predominant, the educational environment has an important role, as it can be a protective factor for the adolescent's development. School is where interactions among peers take place, in addition to the formal learning process. Behavioral changes, symptoms, and other vulnerabilities that may impact students' development are better detected in this setting, which is why teachers and school administrators may be protective agents, preventing problems and promoting mental health (Petrucci et al., 2016; Poletto & Koller, 2008)

It is important to consider that adolescent mental health outcomes are poorer when attending poorly resources school environments (Ross et al., 2000; Wickrama & Bryant, 2003; Williams & Collins, 2016). For example, depressive symptoms are negatively associated with school resources (Coley et al., 2018, 2019; Goodman et al., 2003), and this shows up across all stages of adolescence (Coley et al., 2019). This suggests that socioeconomic disparities and depressive symptoms may be related to stresses of economic disadvantage (Weinberger et al., 2018). Students attending low-funded schools may have less access to health promoting resources, greater exposure to hazards, and greater exposure to a range of chronic stressors than students attending higher SES schools. Further, the daily stress of attending a low-SES school may produce feelings of hopelessness, frustration, and loneliness and increase distress and dysregulation (Ross et al., 2000; Wickrama & Bryant, 2003). Moreover, because of the structure of schools both public and private, it is

likely that adolescents from higher SES families are interacting with similarly advantaged peers, and adolescents from lower SES families are surrounded primarily by less advantaged peers, nurturing a looping of risk factors for mental health issues because of the differential access to resources and exposure to stressors (Coley et al., 2019).

Low-SES schools may be more susceptible to the “toxic schools” phenomena, that contrary to expectations, the school can negatively impact the development of the adolescent. Especially in contexts of inequalities, where exposure to multiple forms of violence and other risks is heightened, it has been identified that school spaces in these neighborhoods also struggle with a lack of resources. Considering that often these schools are attended by low-SES children and adolescents, who are more likely to be identified as brown or black, there is a tendency for growing increased risk of further exacerbating inequalities (Goosby & Walsemann, 2012; Walsemann et al., 2011a, b). Studies of the effects of attending high-poverty and high-minority schools found that students fare worse academically because of attending those schools and may also have worse health outcomes due to the stress of these environments (Logan et al., 2012; Reardon, 2016; Rumberger & Palardy, 2006)

The multiple dimensions theory of school toxicity suggests three main indicators: perceptions of school safety and indications of violence, teacher turnover, and perceptions of school cohesion and connectedness (Pauille, 2013). A recent study has indicated that school safety and violence, low school connectedness, and overall levels of school toxicity are strongly associated with markers of physiological dysregulation and psychological well-being among children and adolescents (Boen et al., 2020).

School toxicity is not an inevitable phenomenon but results from policies and institutional practices that systematically segregate and disinvest in schools that serve low-income families. Between incidents of violence and the threat of violence, a perpetual state of stress and fear is present among students and teachers in these schools (Boen et al., 2020; Pauille, 2013). Teachers were not always available as a source of support, because they too often burned out from the physical and emotional toil of managing their own fear and stress. As a result, teacher turnover and institutional disorder is high, and students could not effectively develop the kind of relationships with adults that they needed to cope with and reduce their stress (Pauille, 2013). Moreover, high-poverty and high-minority schools are more likely to have fewer senior teachers, higher rates of teacher turnover, and teachers who are less familiar with their student population (Clotfelter et al., 2007; Morris, 2005). These factors could lead to more disorder and more stress for students and teachers.

School SES likely operates through multiple mechanisms to affect student health, such as nutritional school-provided meals, chronic stress induced by fear of violence, and lack of connectedness (Boen et al., 2020). Violence exposure impacts children’s sleep and cortisol patterns (Heissel et al., 2017), and safety threats in one’s social environments may harm health through stress-related pathways. Perceptions of safety and violence may promote worry and hypervigilance among students in ways that chronically activate stress response systems to ultimately

impact both acute and future health and well-being (Gooding et al., 2015; Heissel et al., 2017; Kirk & Hardy, 2014; McCoy et al., 2015). Low levels of school connectedness were also strongly and consistently associated with a higher risk of physiological dysregulation and greater numbers of depressive symptoms from adolescence through young adulthood (Boen et al., 2020). In fact, school environments can serve as early-life stressors that can unequally shape health trajectories from adolescence through adulthood (Boen et al., 2020).

In addition to the school, the family environment can also act as a protective factor, offering the appropriate cohesion and emotional support for youth development. Also, like schools, unhealthy family environment may make children even more vulnerable. It is expected that the family provides a place for health, warmth, and stimulation (Bronfenbrenner, 2004; Minuchin et al., 1999). For the bioecological theory, the family is an open and changing sociocultural system that establishes constant exchanges among its subsystems and, at the same time, with extrafamilial systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1996; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Thus, it must be understood as a system inserted in a larger system, suffering multiple influences and also influencing them (Cerveny, 1994). In fact, family cohesion can protect children from violent contexts or extreme vulnerable situations (Gershoff et al., 2007).

Families experiencing social vulnerability, however, can be affected by multiple challenges like difficulty accessing essential rights, precarious housing and working conditions, and food insecurity (Kohen et al., 2008; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Minuchin et al. (1999) suggest that violence, in the case of vulnerable families, may present first as violations that occur within the families themselves, due to poverty and powerlessness embedded in the family life cycle and the harm caused by social interventions. These interventions come from the intrusion and absolute power of society to impose control and external rules, weakening the internal bonds and disempowering the microsystem. There are also violations of the context, a reflection of social inequality, which creates fragility in the family to protect itself against drug traffic, which also imposes rules of behavior. With this context, we have seen that because many of these families depend on the public systems of health, education, and social assistance, they often seem to “not write their own story.” They accept standardization by the institutional network and, ultimately, by society. As children witness this, they learn early that the adults in their family feel no power or autonomy. Professionals in that system may undermine parental authority and exacerbate an already vulnerable system, influencing patterns in harmful ways (Minuchin et al., 1999).

As a result of these dynamics, the families' relationship with their neighborhood can also influence the quality of connection between family members and, by extension, the family functioning (Giles-Sims & Lockhart, 2005). In the Brazilian high-risk communities where we work, the family stress model (FSM) of economic hardship helps articulate the context we observe. It suggests that financial difficulties have an adverse effect on parents' emotions, behaviors, and relationships, which in turn negatively influence their parenting strategies (Conger & Conger, 2002; Conger & Donnellan, 2007). Variables related to families in vulnerable situations, such as low education levels, lack of financial resources, physical violence, drug

trafficking, and unemployment, can significantly increase the potential for dysfunctional outcomes in this microsystem (Gershoff et al., 2007; Lordello & de Oliveira, 2012), increasing risk for emotional distress (depression, anxiety, anger, and neglect) and for behavioral problems, such as substance abuse (Taber-Thomas & Knutson, 2021) and aggressive behaviors (Conger & Donnellan, 2007). These emotional or behavioral problems predict increased marital conflict and reduced marital warmth. This process diminishes nurturing and the needed attentive parenting to support adolescent development. That is, parents involved in personal problems and marital distress demonstrate less affection toward their children, like being less involved in activities, and being more irritable, harsh, and inconsistent in their disciplinary practices (Conger & Donnellan, 2007). Overall, these background characteristics tend to reduce the frequency of positive parenting behaviors, such as warmth and adequate discipline, and increase the rate of problematic parenting behaviors, such as punitive interactions (Conger & Donnellan, 2007; Knutson et al., 2005; Kohen et al., 2008).

Developmental impacts in children and adolescents are also described in the literature, indicating that social and economic conditions and individual aspects may be reciprocally interrelated over time (Conger & Donnellan, 2007; Gershoff et al., 2007). When families experience economic hardship, children and adolescents are at risk for suffering both decreases in positive adjustment (cognitive ability, social competence, school success, and attachment to parents) and increases in internalizing (symptoms of depression and anxiety, low self-esteem) or externalizing (e.g., aggressive and antisocial behavior) problems (Coldwell et al., 2008; Conger & Conger, 2002; Conger & Donnellan, 2007; Fiese & Winter, 2010; Louie et al., 2017). This dynamic holds true even across a several-year period (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2005). On the other hand, increases in family income are associated with reduced children's symptoms of depression and antisocial behavior (Strohschein, 2005). Parenting stress moderates the association between poverty and child adjustment, increasing its negative impact (Steele et al., 2016). Moreover, life stressors can have a cumulative negative effect, showing a cycle of disadvantages which children and adolescents in low-income situation are exposed (Berk, 2013; Louie et al., 2017). This cycle can be attenuated by the presence of social support that enables coping and decreases the negative effects of stressful situations (Seibel et al., 2017).

Mesosystem: An Example of Brazilian Community Relationships to Support Adolescent Development

In 2018, a community psychology program was proposed at a higher education institution in the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre, in southern Brazil. This community was an area of high social vulnerability. The idea was to create a psychological support service for the local adolescents and their families who were facing high

levels of emotional distress from stress, crisis, and significant trauma. To develop interventions that genuinely meet the needs in that context, a community-based participatory research (CBPR) model was used. The aim was to work with key stakeholders to design interventions to meet the needs identified by the stakeholders themselves (Seibel et al., [in press](#)).

The Vila da Paz neighborhood and its surrounding area, located in the city of Cachoeirinha in southern Brazil, were selected based on a survey of areas with higher rates of social vulnerability in the city. Data were collected through surveys completed by the city government about the areas they support. Information about average income; neighborhood infrastructure; access to health, education, and social services; and violence and crime were taken into account. With the neighborhood chosen, a network of institutions in the Vila da Paz neighborhood was identified and invited to participate in a research intervention. Some of the formal institutions were municipal schools, the primary healthcare unit, the social assistance reference center, and neighborhood associations. One of these associations was identified to act as the first point of contact with the researcher in charge because they were interested in extending their already considerable work in the area.

This city is in the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre, with a population of 127,318 and an area of 44,018 km (about 27351.52 mi²). It has a Municipal Human Development Index (MHDI) of 0.757 and a GDP per capita of 47,494 reais, the fourth highest in its micro-region. The average monthly income is 2.5 minimum salaries, and 28.5% of the population receives up to half the minimum monthly wage, with a poverty incidence of 29.35%. The infant mortality rate is 12.35 deaths per thousand live births. In terms of education, the enrolment rate from 6 to 14 years is 96%, with 38 primary schools and 17 secondary schools (IBGE, [2023b](#)).

CBPR is designed to engage the community in the process, and as such it does not have a strict model of how it should be carried out. As its name suggests, the path forward is made on the basis of the needs identified by the specific community in which it is carried out. Another essential factor to be considered about CBPR is that it is developed in partnership with the community, through knowledge sharing and empowerment of the community (Israel et al., [2005](#)).

The advantages of CBPR are that because the interventions are developed with the community, there is greater buy-in and commitment because of the social and cultural validity of the intervention (Dias & Gama, [2014](#); Israel et al., [2005](#)). However, one of the main disadvantages of CBPR is that it is long-term research, which can take years. This is because researchers work with the community to investigate the situation and develop an intervention to address that problem. As the interventions are built with community members using community resources, community engagement continues after the project or evolves into new projects. One of the main aims of CBPR is to reduce social inequality by empowering the community, through supporting them to solve problems over time. By using the community's own knowledge and suggestions, the community develops the confidence to solve its problems without the researchers (Israel et al., [2005](#)).

As part of our CBPR efforts, we learned from them the importance of the dynamics of families and observed the relationships between families, institutions, and the

neighborhood. We spent time in the community and visited homes, talking to them about their needs and collecting data about what the adolescents and their families believed was needed. As we talked to them, they helped us get to know other young people in the neighborhood. As we carried out the action residents shared with us, we sought to make visible the wisdom of the people who are not usually heard by society. We targeted the knowledge-sharing of low-income, mostly black, mostly female heads of households or single-parent families living in an ‘invaded’ territory with no infrastructure, no basic sanitation, no treated water, and no stable electricity. Living in these conditions, they often did not have easy access to public health, social welfare, or education services.

Despite the lack of infrastructure and resources, we found that once we were accepted into the community, the people were willing to share their perception of what was needed. The microsystem section will share some of the many things this community taught us.

Microsystem: Adolescents’ Perspectives of Their Relationships and Development During the Pandemic

From the experience with adolescents in this socially vulnerable community, the field experience and data demonstrated that although the cases were complex and diverse, there were still patterns of relationships and behavior in the community. Most of the young people who were connected to the support system in the community did not have close contact with their father, or their father was completely absent. Indeed, the number of families headed by women or single mothers is higher in the context of poverty. There were many reasons the fathers were not present but here are some examples; they had abandoned the family, did not acknowledge paternity of the child, were in another relationship that reduced the closeness with the previous family, were imprisoned or deprived of liberty, were involved in crime or drug trafficking, or had even died. In some more traumatic cases, fathers were killed in front of their children. Depending on the circumstances before the absence, the father figure could be idealized or rejected. In most cases, regardless of the circumstances, it caused a great deal of emotional distress for the adolescent. This distress presented itself as chronic stress as well as trauma depending on the context. Evidence of family coping played out in the narratives they used about the fathers’ absence. When families found healthy ways of talking about it, that strengthened the adolescent. One theme that we found was that if the father or other family members are involved in illegal activities, such as drug dealing, the adolescents adopted an atmosphere of family secrecy. In our therapeutic groups, it was common for these young people to be more reticent to participate and have more difficulty revealing their suffering because it was often tied to the secret they were responsible for keeping.

Another theme from our research was that when adolescents perceived their parents as attentive, they also often described their parenting style as authoritarian and

even coercive. As we worked in this community, we came to respect that to a certain extent, raising children in an environment of violence and insecurity demanded rigorous protective parenting from those responsible. Even though these adults were in most cases also overburdened with their own livelihoods, highly assertive parenting practices were needed in the austere environment (Seibel et al., 2017).

Religion was also tied to stricter standards in the family environment, especially in terms of the power hierarchy. For example, in the early years of adolescent development, sex is a taboo for families following orthodox religions. As a result, adolescents may see some topics as forbidden to discuss with parents and seek other sources of information, such as friends and social networks. At the same time, some adolescents report a routine of attending religious services or groups, demonstrating the importance of belonging to these rituals.

Conflict between young people and their parents or guardians was common and often due to the use of alcohol or other substances, domestic violence, and the presence of psychiatric disorders in adults especially when the parent was not receiving adequate treatment. Because they perceived the family environment as unsafe and dangerous, young people often looked for ways to leave this environment. They spent a lot of time on the streets or in public spaces, which increased their likelihood of involvement with delinquent groups. Consistent with other research about adolescents in this environment, we saw that the lack of ecological cohesion in the family, i.e., nurturing, safety, and an affective developmental environment, was detrimental to the socio-emotional maturation of the adolescents (Dell’Aglia et al., 2006; Dell’Aglia & Koller, 2017).

For Brazilian girls, the prevalence of sexual violence, usually within the family, is particularly severe. According to the most recent data, 45,994 children (about twice the seating capacity of Madison Square Garden) and adolescents were victims of sexual violence in 2021, of whom 35,735, or 61.3%, were girls under the age of 13. The intra-family context is the most common, accounting for 76.5% of cases (IPEA, 2022). It is important to note that sexual violence against children and adolescents includes any form of abuse that takes place in a relationship of responsibility or power and is harmful to the dignity, health, and development of children and adolescents (WHO, 2006). It is obvious that the trauma caused by sexual violence has a powerful impact on development. The responsible authority for reporting sexual violence in Brazilian communities is an agency called the Tutelary Council (Brasil, 1990). However, access to social services and appropriate referrals are not always adequate. Because all these agencies work together within the community, it is unfortunately often the case that if the report of sexual abuse is made by members of the school, it spreads in the community, stigmatizing the young woman and her family. We found that this concern was expressed by adolescents making referrals more difficult and intimidating other young people from reporting situations of violence.

Risk factors in Brazil are often distinguished according to the gender of the adolescent. While boys tend to be more vulnerable to delinquent behaviors like involvement in drug trafficking and acts of violence, girls seem to be more vulnerable to aspects like risky sexual behaviors. In the community work, families involved in

drug trafficking look to male offspring to inherit the “business.” We saw that these adolescents feel pressure from leaders which created a lack of options for these adolescents. Girls reported starting their sexual life early and often getting pregnant in their teens. The understanding of how to care for the family and the domestic environment was learned from an early age. They reported the need to care for siblings, cook, clean the house, and do other tasks. The pressure to assume these responsibilities led to a lack of perceived options for girls as well. This theme of a future lacking options and possibilities was a major factor in the chronic stress some adolescents experienced.

Another common theme for adolescents growing up in these communities was that because of the scarcity of resources, they were overburdened with adult responsibilities, which shortened the period of adolescence (Seibel & Pratti, 2020). In fact, their attendance at school often depended, among other things, on the climate and the resources available to the family. Several reports were received of young people who were unable to attend classes because they did not have appropriate clothing or footwear or because the rain prevented them from moving. In the south of Brazil, where the winter climate is quite harsh, children and young people who attend classes in slippers are often helped by the school or other support agencies. There are also cases of children eating their only meal of the day at school. This was an ongoing point of concern for educators, as hunger negatively affects the learning process and increases the risk for conflict with peers. These ongoing stresses often became so familiar that adolescents just saw it as the way it was and would be.

During the therapeutic groups for adolescents promoted by the partner community agency, the group discussed eating disorders, and it came out that a majority of them struggled with an eating disorder. These disorders were usually hidden from their parents, with bulimia being the most common. Self-harm behaviors like cutting were also frequently reported. One group talked about how self-harm was a coping strategy for feeling abandoned by their parents. Other anxiogenic issues that led to chronic stress were being overburdened with household responsibilities, religious impositions, gender, or sexual orientation.

Because the project was conducted during the pandemic, it was noted that during this period, relationships at home were so conflicted that young people wanted to be isolated in their rooms. They reported a great deal of anxiety about how the return to the classroom would be. Social interaction with peers, which is so important at this stage of the life cycle, became quite limited. In addition, the closure of schools and the difficulty for families to follow school activities due to lack of Internet access widened the educational gap between low- and middle-income youth. However, they also reported that a mobile phone, often only working with Wi-Fi, helped them a lot during this period. They were able to keep in touch with friends and play together online beyond talking on the phone calls.

In the community where we worked, there was significant tension between the school and the family. Often the school perceived families as “problems” or saw families as problematic or as causing problems. One teacher reported that she did not know anything about a pupil’s parents or home life and did not see this as a problem. How does a system that doesn’t know about the individual help him or her

grow and develop? This is not to place blame but merely to point out the challenges that exist in an underfunded system.

This community, like so many others in Brazil and the world, is under-resourced and overburdened with challenges. Service providers do the best they can with what they have but cannot meet the level of need. What does adolescent development look like in an environment with so much stress?

The Person: The Impact on Adolescent Development

The ecological systems described above help us understand many of the factors that increase stress and crisis or provide support through it. However, it is important to remember that these systems influence development, but they don't control it; only the person can do that. The person develops their identity. The person develops how they will respond to the world around them. The person develops the ability to manage expanding emotions. And the person must face the stresses and traumas that come their way. This isn't to say that they are not influenced by the systems described above nor that they are alone in managing those experiences. It is actually in this interplay between the environment and the person that stress, crisis, and trauma impact development. When confronting a traumatic experience, the adolescent draws both from their environment and from within themselves. This capacity for coping is built through their personal abilities coupled with the degree of support that exists in their environment. An understanding of their ecology from the macro-system to the microsystem helps to highlight risk and protective factors that will either help or hinder their development when facing a traumatic experience.

Our work with this community and others like in Brazil has given us great respect for the complexity and elasticity of the process that occurs internally as adolescents grow and mature. We have seen adolescents in extremely challenging circumstances thrive. In order to fully understand the power of this resilience, we want to review some of the personally challenging experiences many adolescents must overcome on their way to adulthood. As we worked with this community, people shared with us concerns about the trials faced by these young people. Their concerns were consistent with the characteristics of the adverse childhood experiences research introduced earlier (Felitti et al., 1998). There are ten ACE categories in three areas: abuse, neglect, and household environment. These ten categories comprise the factors that consistently have the greatest impact on stress and crisis for youth. There are three abuse categories: physical, sexual, and emotional. The two neglect categories are physical and emotional. And the categories related to the household environment are parental mental illness, separation/divorce of parents, substance use, witnessing domestic violence, and having a household member incarcerated. Each category exposes adolescents to crisis and often significant trauma. While these ten categories were initially identified through research in the United States, their impact has been researched and validated throughout the world, including in Brazil.

The total number of ACE categories experienced has a profound impact on mental and physical health even much later in life (Felitti et al., 1998). As individuals experience more of the ten categories of ACEs, the impact of those experiences elevates their risk of mental and physical illness. The impact of each individual ACE varies depending on the experience itself and the individual. Global research has also found that these experiences are common. In the original study, more than two-thirds of the participants had experienced at least one ACE before the age of 18 (Felitti et al., 1998). Prevalence rates from a region near where we conducted our research found that 85% of the nearly 4000 adolescents studied had experienced at least 1 ACE by the age of 18 (Soares et al., 2016). They also reported that factors like household income, low maternal schooling, and the absence of a mother's partner increased the likelihood of ACEs. These characteristics were prevalent in the community where we work increasing the likelihood that these youth have experienced one or more ACEs.

The way they and their environment respond to the crisis or trauma determines the degree to which it has a long-term impact. As with much of Brazil, the availability of official services is driven by resources available to the municipality. When municipalities don't have sufficient resources, they are not able to provide sufficient educational, law enforcement, and health services. This is not to say that adolescents who experience trauma in this community are without support. We learned that because the governmental system did not have the capacity needed, members of the community often stepped up to try and provide that support. One member of this community started a library that grew into a clothing exchange and a community center where neighborhood youth frequently hang out. The more youth spent time there, the more they trusted her to help them deal with challenges. From the very beginning of working with the community, we heard about people who stepped up to meet a need.

The network of supportive people in the community tried to compensate for the lack of formal support. This is not to say that all needs were met because there was still a great need for additional support services. However, when people didn't have those services, they did what they could as a community to address the need. Adolescents still faced the challenge of coping and making meaning of their struggles through any resource they could access. Here are some of the things we learned from these youth about the way they manage stress.

Hope in the future was both the result of needed support and an antidote for the challenges. Their ability to access support from family, friends, and the community and their trust in those supports had an impact on their hope. They reported a range of hopefulness in the future. Some reported hopes and dreams while others felt dread and apathy toward the future. People also shared with us that they saw fluctuations in their hopefulness, one moment feeling hopeful and another apathy. The presence of hope was also an antidote for challenges which seemed to be related to increasing their likelihood of making choices that promote their well-being like working hard in school or not using substances. Hope in the future was at times the result of a positive support system as well as a drive toward healthy development for adolescents facing challenges in the community.

Another aspect exemplified by the volatility of hope was the fluidity of this developmental period. Emotional stability was especially impacted for youth who had experienced trauma. It was common that uncertainty about the future was linked with hopelessness in the future. The normal ups and downs during identity exploration were exacerbated by the complexity of making meaning of trauma as part of one's life experience but not their identity.

One aspect of adolescent development frequently discussed when talking about risk-taking behaviors is the sense of invincibility that is present for many young people. This is often discussed as a concern and cause of risky behaviors, but we saw that this was also tied to their perspective that they would overcome whatever was in their path. It isn't uncommon for youth to engage in behaviors that suggest they think they are invincible. With the challenges these youth face in their community, having an inflated belief in one's abilities seemed to encourage them to accept challenges and make efforts to overcome them. As we engaged in the community, it was clear that these youth faced very complex choices, especially those who spend a portion of their adolescent years during the pandemic: whether it was the unknown about school, distance from friends, or the unknown health risk they had to learn to adapt. The youth in this community inspired us with their strength and resilience.

Conclusion

We started our work in this community believing that these families possessed the capability to confront the many challenges they faced. As we began working with them, we saw people stepping up to help other members of the community. There were significant problems, but there were also people in the community willing to stand beside others who were suffering and help in any way possible. We believe that this is true of communities like this throughout the world. If we as professionals look closely enough, we can find good people who will give their time to help those around them. They are often not the ones in the limelight, but they are generally people who have significant respect in the community. If these people become our partners and we really listen to them, they can inform us of the work that needs to be done to impact the unique needs of that community.

Not only are there people willing to give their time, but there are also people in the community who know the community really well. They know who is struggling and who can help. Despite a shortage of resources in the community system, these people know the community well enough to see what will help community members most. The challenge was organizing people in the community so that their time and wisdom compounded the impact. As adolescents deal with stress and crisis, community members can help determine the most effective ways to intervene.

Because the environment can either safeguard or exacerbate the impact of stress and trauma on the adolescents' individual development, it is important to engage the willingness to give time and wisdom for both prevention and treatment

interventions. Regardless of the services available in the community, looking to community members is critical for interventions that are sustainable and long-lasting. We find it important to remember that the people who know the adolescents and the community best are the ones living in it. We will be most successful if interventions are developed with them and not for them.

We are inspired by the resilience of the adolescents and their families in this community. There are many moments of struggle but more moments of strength and courage. They often face trauma with insufficient services, but they lean on family and the community. Their resilience in the face of challenges demonstrates their potency. We also saw their resilience in their positivity, especially among their peers. Brazil overall has a culture of joy and optimism. Despite all the problems described above, most of these young people laugh, they joke, and they love the people around them.

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Chapter 8

Family Risk and Protective Influences on Adolescent Substance Use in Global Context



W. Alex Mason

Adolescent substance use is a global public health concern. Although there are variations within and across country contexts in the types and amounts of substances used by adolescents, the central role of the family in engendering risk as well as fostering protection is ubiquitous. Indeed, prior research has identified a range of family-related risk and protective factors for adolescent substance use, and this knowledge has been translated into the development of family-focused interventions designed to mitigate against such use and its adverse consequences. The widespread dissemination of effective, culturally appropriate, family-focused preventive interventions represents one of the most promising strategies for reducing the global health burden of adolescent substance use. However, this promise is not being fully realized due to gaps in knowledge that can only be filled with additional studies that extend prior research conducted predominantly in high-income countries. In this chapter, I provide an overview of global trends in adolescent substance use and its effects on the health and well-being of young people. Next, I review what is known about the risk and protective factors for adolescent substance use, including cultural similarities and differences, and then highlight selected family-focused substance use preventive interventions. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a discussion of pressing needs and critical next steps for research and practice.

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Global Trends in Adolescent Substance Use

The use of substances such as alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs (e.g., cannabis) tends to begin in adolescence, starting around ages 15 and 16 years. This is a concern because adolescence is a critical period of development characterized by ongoing brain maturation, biological changes (e.g., puberty), and developmental transitions (e.g., increasing independence). Adolescent substance use is a widespread phenomenon, but there are marked variations in the prevalences and amounts of substances used by adolescents across countries and cultures. To illustrate, it is estimated that more than 25% of individuals aged 15–19 years are current drinkers, representing approximately 155 million adolescents worldwide (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021). Over 24% of adolescents (15–19 years old) in the Europe Region report heavy episodic drinking, typically defined as having four or more drinks in a row for females and five or more drinks in a row for males, compared to 18.8% in the Western Pacific Region, 18.5% in the Region of the Americas, 12.7% in the African Region, and 10% in the Southeast Asian Region; such drinking is virtually nonexistent among adolescents in the Eastern Mediterranean region (World Health Organization, 2018). The most commonly used illicit drug among adolescents is cannabis with an estimated 15 million users aged 15–19 years worldwide, corresponding to an overall annual prevalence of 5.7% but ranging from 14.5% in North America to 2% in Asia (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021).

The surveillance of adolescent substance use on a national level has been more common in high-income countries than in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). For example, in the United States, the *Monitoring the Future* study has been charting substance use trends in nationally representative samples of adolescents since 1975 (Miech et al., 2022). Similar efforts are increasing in country contexts that historically have received less attention (Soleimanvandiazar et al., 2022). In one recent study, de la Torre-Luque et al. (2021) used data from the Global School-based Student Health Survey to document the prevalence of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use among students aged 13–17 years across 73 LMICs. Results showed, for example, that the weighted prevalence of heavy episodic drinking ranged from 20% in Colombia to negligible levels in Myanmar (3% overall across all 73 LMICs). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2021) projects an increase of 43% in the population at highest risk for substance use (e.g., growing numbers of young people) in low-income countries by 2030 compared to a corresponding increase in the at-risk population of 10% in middle-income countries and a decrease of –1% in high-income countries. Thus, increased surveillance of adolescent substance use in LMICs is needed.

Of course, there are vast differences both across and within high-, middle-, and low-income country contexts in cultural factors and policies that can affect the prevalence of adolescent substance use. Regarding cultural factors, for example, de la Torre-Luque et al. (2021) further showed that adolescent alcohol consumption was significantly lower in LMICs where the Muslim religion is influential compared to

those where the Christian religion is influential. Regarding policy, for example, the minimum legal drinking age currently ranges worldwide from as young as age 16 years to as high as age 21 years (most are age 18 years), and some countries have no law determining the minimum age at which individuals can drink alcohol, despite the fact that higher MLDA have been shown to reduce alcohol-related morbidity and mortality among young people (DeJong & Blanchette, 2014). Cannabis decriminalization and legalization are occurring worldwide (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2020) with corresponding increases in adolescents' favorable attitudes toward using cannabis (Sarvet et al., 2018), although it remains unclear whether or not such policies are leading to a higher prevalence of cannabis use among adolescents (Anderson et al., 2019; Laqueur et al., 2020). The policy context surrounding the sale and use of electronic cigarettes (Kennedy et al., 2017) also is rapidly changing and varies globally (Becker & Rice, 2022).

Consequences of Adolescent Substance Use

Substance use during adolescence can lead to a range of adverse biological, psychological, and social consequences. Substance use is especially problematic for adolescents because it can affect their brains, which have not yet fully developed. Alcohol, nicotine, cannabis, and other drugs are psychoactive substances that alter the brain's neurochemistry and, as a result, can disrupt ongoing brain maturation with lasting effects on users. Nicotine, for example, has been shown to disrupt processes in the adolescent brain within the prefrontal cortex (PFC), a region associated with cognitive control and executive functioning (Goriounova & Mansvelder, 2012). Many substances also affect the limbic system – a region of the brain associated with emotion, motivation, and reward – by, for example, increasing levels of the neurotransmitter dopamine, which contributes to the pleasure and reinforcing properties of substances (Di Chiara et al., 2004). Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to addiction through a negative reinforcement cycle in which the pleasure resulting from substance use is followed by negative affect due to withdrawal, leading to escalating substance use in an attempt to cope with the negative affect and restore pleasure (Koob, 2013).

Substance use also is problematic for adolescents because it can compromise their ability to accomplish the developmental tasks of this period of the life course. Although the specific nature of those tasks varies across cultures, adolescents generally must strive to (1) develop psychological well-being and physical health, (2) succeed in school and/or at work, and (3) form and maintain close relationships. However, research shows that substance use elevates adolescents' risk for experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression (e.g., Rasic et al., 2013) as well as for engaging in delinquency (e.g., Mason & Windle, 2002). Adolescent substance use, especially when it starts early (e.g., prior to age 15) and occurs at high levels, increases the likelihood of developing substance use disorders (e.g., Sung et al., 2004). Of course, adolescents typically do not experience the chronic physical

conditions, such as cirrhosis and lung cancer, that can result from protracted substance use. Still, substance use (e.g., drinking) often plays a role in the three most common forms of morbidity and mortality among adolescents including suicides, homicides, and accidents (e.g., motor vehicle crashes) and, therefore, is a major contributor to the global burden of disease (Degenhardt et al., 2016).

Substance use can contribute to school failure (Gasper, 2011). For example, studies have highlighted the potential for cannabis use in adolescence to impair working memory and cognitive functioning (Volkow et al., 2014), both of which underlie academic performance. Impairments resulting from substance use can further affect school attendance, homework completion, and test performance. Students who use substances heavily are more likely to drop out of school than those who use infrequently or abstain altogether (Gasper, 2011). Likewise, research conducted primarily in high-income countries shows that substance use can compromise adolescents' ability to obtain and hold a job in the future (Ringel et al., 2007). Adolescent substance use also can lead to relationship difficulties (e.g., arguments, physical altercations) within the family as well as with peers and romantic partners (Russell et al., 2019).

Both the nature and extent of adolescent substance use consequences vary across groups and settings. In particular, there are marked disparities in the experience of substance-related problems according to minoritized racial/ethnic group status and other social factors. For example, in the United States, while adolescents who identify as Black/African American report lower rates of almost all substances (e.g., alcohol, tobacco, cannabis) than their White counterparts (Pamplin et al., 2020), Black/African Americans who do initiate substance use are more likely than Whites to develop substance use disorders and experience other adverse consequences (Zapolski et al., 2014). There are a number of possible explanations for this paradox, including experiences of stigma and racism as well as lack of access to timely and adequate substance use services among Blacks/African Americans who use substances. In summary, the consequences of adolescent substance use can be serious and lasting; however, they do not unfold in a deterministic manner but, instead, are dependent on characteristics of the individual and their environment. Nonetheless, because adolescence is recognized as a vulnerable developmental period, considerable efforts have been directed toward identifying risk and protective factors for adolescent substance use.

Risk and Protective Factors for Adolescent Substance Use

An introduction to risk and protective factors A risk factor increases the likelihood of substance use outcomes, including initiation, progression in quantity and frequency of use, heavier involvement (e.g., heavy episodic drinking), and the experience of substance-related problems, including substance use disorders. The term protective factor often refers to a factor that decreases the likelihood of negative outcomes. Inherent in these definitions is the idea that risk and protective factors

precede and predict, either positively (risk) or inversely (protection), later substance use outcomes. This is because the search for risk and protective factors ultimately endeavors to identify the *causes* of adolescent substance use and causes must precede outcomes. Of course, there are many additional considerations in making judgments about causality, but the most informative risk and protective factor research uses a prospective longitudinal design in which risk and protective factors are measured before the outcomes as participants are followed over a specified timeframe (e.g., 6 months, 12 months, or many years). Notwithstanding the search for causes, it is important to note that risk and protective factors for adolescent substance use also are not deterministic; instead, their effects depend on numerous additional individual and environmental characteristics.

Biopsychosocial-ecological-developmental framework Various risk and protective factors for adolescent substance use have been organized in different ways, for example, as being either *biological* (e.g., inherited liability), *psychological* (e.g., difficult temperament, depressive symptoms), or *social* (e.g., peer pressure, school bonding) in nature. Risk and protective factors for adolescent substance use also can be organized *ecologically* from the individual (e.g., favorable attitudes about substances) out to the macrosystem (e.g., substance use laws and policies) or *developmentally* from the prenatal period (e.g., exposure to substances in the womb) through adolescence (e.g., having more unsupervised time). Thus, a broad biopsychosocial-ecological-developmental framework has emerged as one of the most comprehensive ways to organize the numerous factors that play a role in adolescent substance use. A comprehensive analysis of these factors is beyond the scope of this chapter, but reviews can be found elsewhere (Hawkins et al., 1992; Nawi et al., 2021; Whitesell et al., 2013).

Importance of family in the lives of adolescents Cultures display rich diversity in definitions of the family and in family structures. Importantly, risk for adolescent substance use is not restricted to a particular form or type of family, and all families provide powerful contexts in which to enhance protection and build resilience in youth. For the family of origin, some influences are biological in nature. For all families, fundamental socializing and social learning processes contribute to adolescents' health and well-being, including their decisions about substance use. For many years, it was a prevailing belief that peer influences replace family influences in the lives of adolescents. It is now known that parents and caregivers continue to shape the lives of young people throughout adolescence and beyond (Hair et al., 2008), albeit using different strategies (e.g., advice-giving, rule-setting) than when their children were younger. Of note, children and adolescents are active agents in their development, and there are "child-driven" effects on parents and caregivers. In a recent (unpublished) analysis, for example, my colleagues and I found that executive control difficulties (e.g., lack of impulse control) in preschool-age children contributed to feelings of anger on the part of parents, and parental anger increased, in turn, the likelihood of those children initiating e-cigarette use in adolescence. Overall, the importance and impact of the family cannot be overstated; therefore, it

Table 8.1 Family risk and protective factors for adolescent substance use across child development

Period of development	Risk factor	Protective factor
Prenatal/birth		
	Family history of addiction	Family support
	Exposure to drugs in the womb	Family resources
Childhood		
	Child abuse and neglect	Parental warmth/sensitivity
	Parental incarceration	Authoritative parenting style
	Family conflict Family structure	Positive parent-child relationship quality
		Parental support
		Parental involvement Familism
Adolescence		
	Parental modeling of substance use	Family rules against substance use
	Parental favorable attitudes about substance use	Parental monitoring Parent-adolescent communication
	Availability of substances in the home Sibling substance use	Moderate, consistent discipline

is not surprising that of the numerous risk and protective factors for adolescent substance use that have been identified, many occur at the family level and are evident throughout child development, as summarized in Table 8.1 and reviewed below.

Family risk factors for adolescent substance use In families of origin, the risk for adolescent substance use can begin as early as conception and prenatal development. Having a history of addiction in the family is a risk factor because many substance-related outcomes are, to some degree, heritable (Kendler et al., 1997). Still, as noted by Meyers and Dick (2010), there is “no gene for alcoholism” (p. 465) or any other addiction. Instead, multiple genes and gene pathways contribute in complex ways and in interaction with each other and with environmental influences to generate risk for adolescent substance use. In addition to genetic influences, prenatal exposures to drugs can contribute not only to adverse developmental outcomes for children (e.g., fetal alcohol syndrome) but also to risk for adolescent substance use (Dodge et al., 2019). However, these genetic and biological influences are not deterministic but vary according to complex features of the individual and the environment.

Family risk factors for adolescent substance use also are evident postnatally and throughout childhood. In particular, child maltreatment is a robust risk factor. Harsh physical discipline, emotional abuse, sexual victimization, and neglect have all been shown to increase the likelihood of adolescent substance use (Tonmyr et al., 2010). When these experiences are highly traumatic and chronic, they can “get under the skin” and alter children’s physiological stress response with lasting consequences

(Berens et al., 2017), including elevated risk for substance use and substance use disorders. Additional family-level stressors, such as family conflict (Secades-Villa et al., 2005) and parental incarceration (Davis & Shlafer, 2017), also have been shown to increase adolescent's risk for substance use, and risk is particularly high when multiple stressors accumulate over time (Mason et al., 2016).

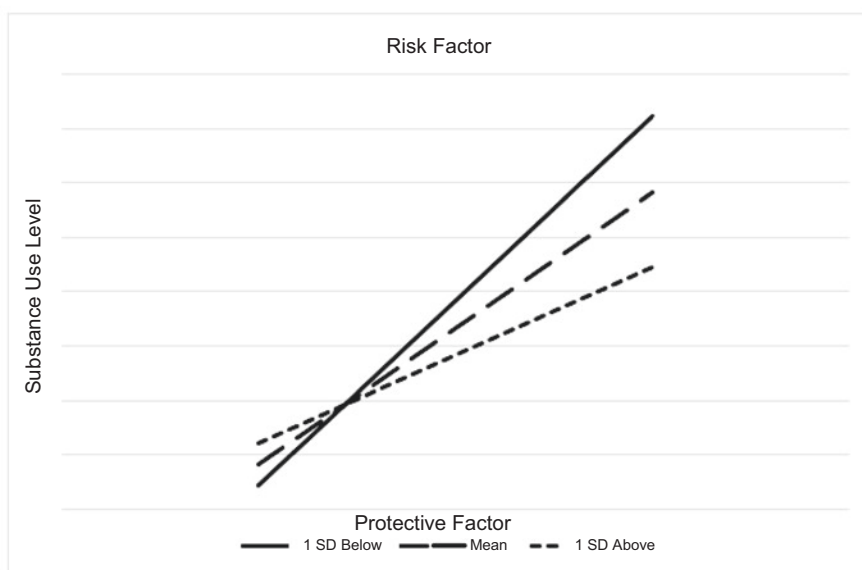
The family environment more proximal to adolescent substance use also is influential. Factors such as parental modeling of substance use behaviors, parental attitudes favorable toward substance use, and availability of substances in the home all can increase the likelihood that adolescents will initiate and continue to use substances (Muchiri & dos Santos, 2018; Secades-Villa et al., 2005). Not all family risks come from parents. Siblings also influence each other. Research shows that adolescent substance use is more likely when a sibling, particularly an older brother or sister, uses substances, which can provide modeling and access to substances (Latimer et al., 2004; Low et al., 2012).

Family protective factors for adolescent substance use Studies of the predictors of adolescent substance use started and persisted for many years with a deficit model, which culminated in lengthy lists of family-level risk factors. Fortunately, the research literature evolved to place greater emphasis on family strengths. Indeed, numerous family factors that can protect adolescents from substance use have been identified (see Table 8.1). Having family supports and resources as early as the prenatal/birth period can help children avoid substance use later in development (Kitzman et al., 2010). Parental warmth and sensitivity as part of an authoritative parenting style that balances demandingness/control with responsiveness/love also can reduce the likelihood of adolescent substance use (Becoña et al., 2012). Positive parent-child relationship quality helps a child develop strong bonds to family and a commitment to the family's values such as those encouraging adolescent substance nonuse (e.g., Yap et al., 2017). Positive and consistent parental support and involvement in a child's life also are protective (e.g., Yap et al., 2017). Such involvement can take many forms for parents, such as sharing in valued activities (e.g., reading, hobbies) and being actively engaged in children's schooling and other pursuits (e.g., sports, clubs). During adolescence, risk is reduced when parents provide clear rules to guide adolescents' decision-making and behaviors (e.g., rules against using substances), when they closely monitor adolescents' whereabouts and develop a relationship conducive to open communication, and when they provide moderate, consistent discipline including rewards for compliance with family rules and appropriate consequences (e.g., loss of privileges) for rule infractions (Carver et al., 2017; Yap et al., 2017).

Notably, the family context can help shape the nature and extent of extrafamilial influences on adolescents to potentially reduce risk for substance use. For example, one of the strongest predictors of substance use among adolescents is association with friends who use substances, but parents/caregivers can help direct their children away from substance-using peers and provide them with the skills needed to resist peer pressure (Marschall-Lévesque et al., 2014). For example, during early adolescence, parents can play a direct role in peer selection. Later in adolescence,

parents can encourage their teenage children to be actively involved in clubs and activities, thereby limiting opportunities for unsupervised time with peers who might be disengaged from school and other prosocial endeavors.

Family resilience against risk for adolescent substance use As noted, protective factors typically are conceptualized as factors that reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes. Alternatively, a protective factor can be conceptualized as something that facilitates adaptive functioning or generates positive outcomes in the presence of a risk factor (Luthar et al., 2000). In other words, a protective factor buffers or attenuates the impact of a risk factor (see Fig. 8.1). In this way, protective factors can be thought of as building *resilience* against substance use in adolescents who otherwise face the types of adversities that place them at risk. This is a powerful concept, particularly in thinking about families, because families in all countries are situated within a larger context often characterized by risks that either are fixed or can be difficult to change at a social-structural level. Protective factors, by contrast, often are more modifiable and can fall under the control of parents and caregivers. To illustrate, in analyses of data from a large cohort of Finnish families who were followed from the time participating children were born through their adolescent years, my colleagues and I found that the impact of cumulative contextual risk at birth on later substance use among youth was weaker in families in which parents/caregivers promoted children's reading engagement during childhood (Mason et al., 2019).



Note. SD = Standard Deviation.

Fig. 8.1 Conceptual illustration of a buffering risk factor x protective factor interaction effect illustrating a weaker positive relationship between the risk factor and substance use at higher levels of the protective factor. Note: SD = standard deviation

Cumulative contextual risk was a count of the number of risk factors, such as lack of family resources and exposure to substances in the womb, whereas reading engagement referred to behaviors such as providing access to books in the home and reading together. Reading engagement not only stimulates children's cognitive development but also is a form of parent-/caregiver-child involvement that can facilitate close relationships. Thus, even in the presence of strong risk factors, families can help protect their children against substance use.

Cultural variations in family risk and protection Many of the family-level predictors of adolescent substance use reviewed above appear to be shared in common across families of all types in multiple country contexts (Atilola et al., 2014; Morojele et al., 2021; Muchiri & dos Santos, 2018). For example, Hemphill et al. (2011) found that multiple family risk factors (e.g., family history of substance use, family conflict) and protective factors (e.g., mother and father involvement) had similar longitudinal associations with substance use for adolescents in both Washington State, the United States, and Victoria, Australia. However, studies are beginning to identify important cultural variations in family risk and protection. In some cases, family factors are universal but have stronger or weaker associations with adolescent substance use in certain contexts compared to others. Oesterle et al. (2012) found that parents' favorable attitudes toward alcohol use were higher and had stronger positive associations with adolescent drinking in the Netherlands compared to the United States. In a study of 11 European countries, Bjarnson et al. (2003) found that certain family structures, such as living with single fathers or with neither biological parent, were associated with higher levels of adolescent cigarette smoking (e.g., versus living with single mothers or both biological parents) and that associations were stronger in countries where those family structures (e.g., single father) were uncommon. These results indicate that the normative context in which families are embedded plays a role in determining which factors are risk-inducing or protective.

Additional studies have identified family risk and protective factors for adolescent substance use that are unique to particular cultures and settings. Of course, minoritized families in nearly all country contexts often are socially and economically marginalized, which can increase risk. Discrimination, for example, is associated positively with substance use in Black/African American, Latinx, American Indian, and sexual minority adolescents in the United States (Brody et al., 2012; Garrett et al., 2017; Marshal et al., 2008; Okamoto et al., 2009). Immigration and acculturation also are important considerations. Paradoxically, even though it is not uncommon for adolescents in recently immigrated families, especially those moving from LMICs to high-income countries, to experience elevated risk factors (e.g., racism, socioeconomic disadvantage), they often have *lower* rates of substance use than their native-born counterparts (Salas-Wright et al., 2014). Immigrant and refugee adolescents can derive protection against substance use, in part, from their close ties to family and espousal of family-oriented values. For example, familism, which describes a strong commitment to family over individual interests, may decrease the likelihood of substance use among Latinx adolescents and attenuate the effects of

other risks factors such as sibling influences (Cruz et al., 2019). Interestingly, however, the protective effect of immigration status appears to wane as the duration of families' time in their new country context increases and as adolescents become acculturated (Salas-Wright et al., 2014). Acculturation, which describes the process of adopting the language, values, and customs of the new country in which immigrants are living, has been shown to be a robust risk factor for substance use among adolescents in the United States (Sirin et al., 2022). Although this research has provided important advancements, there is a need for additional studies conducted in a wider variety of cultural contexts to further advance understanding in this area. Still, as described in the next section, efforts are already well underway to translate the knowledge we have gained into prevention initiatives.

Adolescent Substance Use Prevention

Studies like those reviewed above have been instrumental in informing the development of family-focused adolescent substance use preventive interventions that are available for use. Information about these interventions is summarized in evidence-based program registries, such as Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development and the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare. Fortunately, results from rigorous tests of these interventions demonstrate that adolescent substance use is a *preventable* health risk behavior.

An introduction to prevention Preventive interventions fundamentally are designed to reduce risk and enhance protection in the lives of participants including children and adolescents (Coie et al., 1993). That is why intervention developers need longitudinal research that elucidates the modifiable risk and protective factors for outcomes of concern, such as adolescent substance use. It is the types of risk and protective factors reviewed above that are targeted for change according to an intervention's core activities (e.g., information-sharing, skills development). Those core activities, ultimately, are designed to achieve one or more prevention-oriented goals. Regarding substance use preventive interventions, one goal can be to keep young people from initiating substance use altogether or to at least delay initiation until a point in time at which substance use may be less harmful (e.g., minimum legal age of use). Some experimentation with substances can be normative in adolescence; therefore, another goal can be to prevent recurrent and heavier use among experimenters. Although less common, preventive interventions sometimes also seek to reduce adverse substance-related outcomes (i.e., harm reduction) among adolescents who are already actively engaged in substance use.

Family-focused adolescent substance use preventive interventions Across the social ecology, the family has a powerful socializing influence on children and adolescents. Accordingly, prevention scientists have invested considerable effort and resources into the development of family-focused adolescent substance use preven-

tive interventions. Different interventions occur at different periods of development. Although the particular intervention components vary, depending on their developmental salience, effective interventions share many of the same basic components (e.g., positive parent-child relationship quality, parent-child involvement). Some interventions only work directly with parents, for example, by seeking to improve parental knowledge and skills. These *parent-training* programs are grounded in the premise that such improvements will generate downstream changes in children's behaviors. Parent-training interventions are valuable, but for adolescent substance use prevention, interventions that work directly with both parents and children as well as with other family members tend to be more effective. Over the past few decades, numerous such *family-focused* interventions have been developed, evaluated, and shown to be effective. A comprehensive listing of these interventions is beyond the scope of this chapter, but reviews can be found elsewhere (e.g., Das et al., 2016). Below, I highlight a few noteworthy examples.

Effective substance use prevention starts early, well before substance onset. The Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) program is a well-established and widely used intervention that connects first-time, single mothers with a specially trained nurse who provides support, education, and skills development throughout pregnancy and through the child's first 2 years of life. Among many other positive outcomes, the NFP has been shown to reduce cigarette, alcohol, and cannabis initiation in target children who were followed post-intervention into early adolescence (Kitzman et al., 2010). It is important to note that the NFP, being focused on the child's first 2 years of life, does not directly address adolescent substance use. Instead, it reduces risk factors (e.g., child abuse and neglect, maternal substance-related problems) and enhances protective factors (e.g., nurturing and enriching home environment) in the lives of young mothers and their children that are associated, in turn and over time, with decreased likelihood of adolescent substance use. Of course, as children age, parenting demands and family interactions change. These changes call for different types of intervention strategies. The Positive Parenting Program (aka Triple P) is a comprehensive intervention for families of children up to age 12 years designed to enhance parenting and prevent child maltreatment. The program includes components such as teaching effective discipline skills and helping parents create clear expectations for children. An innovative feature of Triple P is its five-level tiered structure that starts with broad, community-wide outreach efforts and progresses to increasingly intensive group-based counseling interventions with families who are experiencing challenges associated with child behavior problems. This structure helps meet families where their needs are greatest. Triple P has been shown to reduce risk for substance use along with other problem behaviors when target children are adolescents (Chu et al., 2015), likely due to upstream improvements in its proximal outcomes such as enhanced parenting skills.

Interventions for families of adolescent-age children seek to improve relationship quality and parenting skills, just as those for younger-age children do, but in developmentally appropriate ways for teens. For example, parental monitoring of children takes on a different form during adolescence, shifting from direct observation

to close communication within the context of a trusting relationship. These interventions also begin to include program components that directly address the topic of substance use. Such components include psychoeducation about the harms associated with substance use as well as skills development activities that help parents develop and communicate clear rules against substance use and help adolescents refuse substance use offers from peers. The Strengthening Families Program: For Parents and Youth 10–14 (SFP 10–14) program is a well-researched, widely used, group-based, family-focused adolescent substance use preventive intervention. SFP 10–14 has seven sessions that are 2 hours each in which parents and adolescents meet separately during the first hour and then all together during the second hour. Each session includes interactive skills-building activities, for example, to help youth resist peer pressure. A similar five-session group-based, family-focused intervention is Guiding Good Choices (GGC). Both SFP 10–14 and GGC have been rigorously evaluated and shown to delay the initiation and frequency of alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana, and other drug use among adolescents (Spath et al., 2009).

Culturally appropriate interventions and adaptations Many “first-generation” family-focused preventive interventions were developed without consideration of cultural appropriateness for minoritized and underserved groups. Fortunately, this has been changing, and there are now a number of tailored, culturally appropriate interventions available. In some cases, these interventions represent adaptations of those developed for and evaluated with predominantly White families. The Strong African American Families Program, for example, is an adaptation of SFP 10–14 for rural African American families living in the southern United States, and it has demonstrated effects on delaying substance use onset among adolescents (Brody et al., 2006). SFP 10–14 also has been adapted for First Nation populations in Canada and American Indian populations in the United States (e.g., Ivanich et al., 2020). In other cases, culturally sensitive interventions for targeted groups have been developed from the ground up. Familias Unidas, for example, is a group-based, family-focused intervention developed for Hispanic populations in the United States. This program has eight to nine 2-hour sessions as well as four to ten family visits covering key content and skills development, such as communication and problem-solving. Group facilitators are Spanish-speaking and bicultural. Familias Unidas has been rigorously evaluated and shown to reduce the rate of increase in substance use among participating adolescents (Pantin et al., 2009).

Many of the family-focused adolescent substance use preventive interventions that currently exist have been developed and evaluated in high-income countries in North America, Europe, and Oceania. This has led to calls for the truly “worldwide application of prevention science” (Catalano et al., 2012). Even in high-income countries, a challenge that has limited the impact of prevention science is the failure to scale up evidence-based interventions at a population level for public health impact. Such scale-up requires integrated systems and funding streams that must be tailored to the unique country contexts in which they are being implemented and can be more challenging in under-resourced LMICs. Notwithstanding the time and

resources needed for these efforts to be successful, the investment in prevention yields both financial and societal dividends that culminate in the improved health and well-being of families and adolescents, particularly those who are the most vulnerable.

Needs and Next Steps

There has been a great deal of progress in understanding the patterns, consequences, and predictors of adolescent substance use as well as in the translation of that knowledge into the development of effective preventive interventions. However, the work is not yet finished. To conclude this chapter, I review five priority needs for additional research and practice initiatives.

Expand the surveillance of adolescent substance use Routine adolescent substance use surveillance is concentrated in selected high-income countries. Nationwide surveys, such as the Monitoring the Future Study in the United States, need to be expanded worldwide. This type of surveillance is necessary for understanding the scope of adolescent substance use in all corners of the globe as well as for charting changing trends in substance use over time. Efforts are particularly needed to provide LMICs with the infrastructure and resource need to implement routine adolescent substance use surveillance systems.

Enhance the understanding of adolescent substance use health disparities The many adverse consequences of adolescent substance use are not evenly distributed across cultures and country contexts. It is often the most disadvantaged adolescents who shoulder the greatest burden and are most likely to experience serious substance-related outcomes such as SUDs. The patterns of health disparities are neither fully characterized nor adequately understood. Most attention to date has been directed toward examining disparate substance use consequences among minoritized populations in high-income countries. These efforts need to continue and would benefit from being expanded to include more inclusive cross-country and within-country comparisons that include understudied LMICs.

More clearly elucidate the causes of adolescent substance use Randomized controlled trials (RCTs) represent the gold standard methodology for determining causality, but adolescent substance use risk/protective factors are not amenable to randomization. Instead, prospective longitudinal studies have been used to identify adolescent substance use predictors, which represent plausible causal influences. There are at least two ways to enhance judgments about causality in such studies: First, rigorous causal inference methods, such as propensity score analysis (Lee & Little, 2017), attempt to mimic within the context of longitudinal observational studies the control of confounders achieved via RCTs. Second, another strategy is to explicitly measure and study as much of the context surrounding adolescent

substance use as possible to gain a fuller understanding of the phenomenon. This strategy calls for numerous studies conducted with a variety of populations in a range of contexts. Unfortunately, however, most such studies to date have been conducted in only a few high-income country contexts. As noted by Hall et al. (2016), “The scarcity of studies in low-income and middle-income countries is a major obstacle in drawing firm conclusions on causal effects, since many of the confounding factors include social, cultural, and interpersonal variables that vary widely between different countries and cultures” (p. 274). Thus, there is a pressing need for additional risk and protective factor research in understudied contexts, such as LIMCs.

Develop more culturally appropriate adolescent substance use preventive interventions There is a need for more culturally appropriate preventive interventions that are tailored for diverse populations in a range of settings. Culturally appropriate interventions can be developed by adapting those used with general populations in other contexts or can be developed from scratch. As noted above, several family-focused preventive interventions share in common many of the same components and activities (e.g., parenting skills), which likely are broadly applicable. However, those components and activities must be communicated using the language and deriving from the values and experiences of the targeted population in order to maximize engagement and impact. Also, culturally appropriate interventions will need to incorporate unique considerations, such as familism or acculturation, that are only relevant to certain populations or in certain contexts. For too long, prevention science has adopted a “one-size-fits-all” strategy and neglected to capitalize on the unique assets of diverse families in understudied regions to more effectively mitigate against adolescent substance use.

Work toward global scale-up of adolescent substance use prevention systems Having a cadre of culturally appropriate, evidence-based, family-focused preventive interventions is not enough to reduce the global burden of disease resulting from adolescent substance use. What is also needed is the widespread and sustained scale-up of those interventions in a way that reduces risk and enhances protection in entire populations. Success in this endeavor requires integrated funding streams and coordinated public systems, such as education and child welfare, that provide the resourcing and infrastructure needed to reach large numbers of families and their adolescents. The successful scale-up of evidence-based prevention has not yet been fully realized even in richly resourced high-income countries and faces further challenges in LMICs where infrastructures and resources can be limited. There is a pressing need to study prevention scale-up in diverse contexts, especially LMICs, and to use the lessons learned to develop effective systems for the purveyance of evidence-based prevention. Doing so holds considerable promise for strengthening families to prevent substance use as well as reduce its harms among adolescents in greatest need on a worldwide scale.

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Chapter 9

Suicidal Ideation Among Chinese College Students over a Decade



Sibo Zhao and Jie Zhang

Introduction

Economic growth in China in recent years has brought about significant societal changes in the social and psychological changes in society. Different from the Western psychopathology study focusing on individual, the study on the influencing factors of suicide among Chinese college students emphasize more on socioeconomic factors, indicating that individuals are embedded in the background of economic development, social transformation and family changes. With that in mind, we conducted a study with several cohort samples in a Chinese university over a decade and tried to explain how suicidal ideation and other mental health outcomes have changed throughout each year of testing. The declining rates of suicidal ideation and depression imply that in the context of economic growth, stabilizing and improving positive mental health states that are impacted by family relationships and functions can help prevent and reduce the risk of suicidal ideation among college students.

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Youth Suicide in China

Youth suicide is a major public health concern around the world. In general, suicide rates in China have declined in recent years (Zhang et al., 2015). However, such trends vary considerably along the urban-rural continuum and across demographic lines, such as gender and age, with the drop in rates more pronounced among younger age groups (Liu et al., 2015; Sun et al., 2013). Suicide remains as one of the top three causes of death among youth and young adults between 15 and 34 years of age and accounts for a staggering 19% of all deaths in this age group (Sha et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2014). Although the incidence of suicide is low among college students (i.e., 18–29 year olds, including graduate students) compared to their peers who are not at a university, suicide death still ranks first among all kinds of nonnatural deaths among Chinese students in institutions of higher education, with devastating consequences for families (Yang & Li, 2015). Parents who lose a child to suicide usually have higher rates of depression, anxiety, and physical problems. Extreme guilt or resentment for not preventing the suicide may trigger family tensions and even divorce. Despite the scale of the problem, little is known about the epidemiology of college students' suicidal behavior in China because prior studies have typically focused on trends only within specific groups (e.g., rural women and elderly) (Jing et al., 2010; Zhong et al., 2016), obscuring potentially important information about developmental differences in changing trends of suicidal behavior among college students.

Macro-socioeconomic Impacts and Suicide

Following Durkheim's theory of suicide in the late nineteenth century (Durkheim, 1966), the association between suicide and macro-socioeconomic changes is well elaborated. According to one school of thought based on Durkheim's theories, the suicide rate increases with economic growth. Unplanned urban growth and social inequality during periods of higher economic expansion (Binitie, 1976) may lead to higher level of social anomie and lower level of social integration as a result of the development of popularized individualism and egoism, subsequently increasing mental health issues (Cooper, 2011).

However, studies conducted in Asia or the developing countries show a negative correlation between the suicide rate and the economic growth or urbanization (Otsu et al., 2004; Ying & Chang, 2009), posing a challenge to the Durkheim's theory. For instance, Zhang and his colleagues (2010) found that the decrease of suicide rates during 1982–2005 in China was significantly correlated with the rapid growth of economy. The Chinese economy has been growing at an unprecedented rate since the early 1980s (Graham et al., 2017), with an average rate of 6–10% growth. Such growth often results in rapid and major changes in many aspects of the society, and such a level of economic achievement has been particularly evident over the last

decade. Economic transformations and privatization have also led to a sharp increase in personal income as well as increasingly complex family divisions of labor, which have been associated with substantial shifts in the living conditions, parent-child relationships, and well-being of the population. Given the important policy implications for suicide prevention, it is important to explore the relationship between these developments and patterns of suicidal behavior in a rapidly changing society such as China.

Mental Health Among College Students

Research on the effects of economic conditions on mental health is significant across different cohorts and remains inconclusive, though mental health problems in childhood and adolescence are associated with wide and enduring economic impacts (Elder Jr., 1974). Thus, young people's mental health is a serious and growing concern among school educators, family members, and mental health professionals. Suicidal ideation, an important predictor for the following suicide attempt and death (Mundt et al., 2013), has been explored among different populations in the world. A number of recent Western studies indicate that there have been large increases in both suicidal ideation and depression in both number and severity among college students (Blanco et al., 2009; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010). Based on reports from the American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment (ACHA-NCHA), suicidal ideation rates in students increased from 9.6% in 2015 to 13.0% in 2018, while the rates of depression diagnoses have increased from 14.5% in 2015 to 18.4% in 2018 (2015, 2018). It is worth noting that the overwhelming majority of previous findings are largely based on the data from economically developed Western societies and data in this respect from currently developing Asian countries, including China, are scarce. Furthermore, given the difficulty of data collection on the topic of suicide and psychopathology, much of the research is based on data collected at singular time points, allowing for identifying correlational patterns, but does not provide definitive evidence regarding links between social change and mental health outcomes (Heng et al., 2013; Zhao & Zhang, 2018). Very few studies, if any, have examined how suicidal ideation has changed over time among Chinese college students. Therefore, trends in the links between suicidal ideation and depression among Chinese college students are still unclear.

In the context of drastic changes in Chinese society, the main purpose of the study highlighted in this chapter was to explore characteristics and trends of suicidal ideation in Chinese college students aged 18 to 24 years inclusively by using 10 years of data from 2007 to 2015 and to explore how trends in mental health outcomes, such as depression, optimism, self-esteem, and perceived social support, have changed differently across sociodemographic groups and how they might be impacted by and impact families.

The Context of China and Hypotheses

China is a nation that has successfully implemented a population policy to affect its demographic processes by reducing the birth rate and one that has experienced rapid economic and industrial development over the past two decades. Generally, there are about two major changes likely to affect the patterns of youth's mental health trajectories:

First, the Chinese parent-child relationship within families has changed, with an increasing number of working parents shifting their focus from work to children. This shift is not only because of the one-child policy that children in China have become ever more precious but also due to the influence of intensive parenting ideology. Traditional Chinese parenting has been depicted as the authoritarian style (Baumrind, 1967) in that parents not only endorse the use of authoritarian methods (e.g., physical punishment) in child-rearing but also are held accountable for their children's failures (Chao, 1995). Due to the recent changes in the structure of Chinese families under the one-child policy, some researchers believe that although traditional Chinese parenting may still exist within the contemporary Chinese parent-child relationship, more and more Chinese parents tend to practice authoritative parenting that emphasizes parental support and warmth (Chen et al., 2000). The intrafamily relationships were no longer based on parental authority but rather on the child and aiding him or her to grow up correctly. Consequently, the demands and expectations associated with childcare have grown. Intensive parenting ideology, as a new parenting norm, has become a dominant aspect of parenting today. Parents are constantly concerned with their children's safety and feel pressure to enhance children's intellectual development (e.g., paying for pianos, computers, and all kinds of learning tools or sending of the children to special skills classes) (Shirani et al., 2011). Under the influence of such family ideology, children receive unprecedented material and emotional support in the stage of educational growth. Even when a child grows up and leaves home to go to college, the intimacy between parents and children remains an important part of the social network of college students. When facing problems, most college students still choose to seek help from family, relatives, and friends. The family provides very important resources for the development of mental health and the reduction of suicide risk of college students.

Second, economic reforms have increased people's education and income levels which are negatively associated with the risk of suicide. Economic development has generally raised the standard of living of the population, which enables parents to provide all aspects of support for their children's growth, so that individual's life satisfaction is greatly improved. China's higher education expansion commenced in 1999, affecting the educational opportunities of various population groups. It allowed people living in poverty to have an opportunity to obtain a college education. As a result, annual college enrollment increased from 1 million in 1998 to 7.9 million in 2018, according to Chinese census data (2019). As higher education is the key to access to professional, managerial, and government positions, it often is associated with higher income. For these reasons, highly educated individuals are benefited the most from the socioeconomic transitions and, therefore, are less likely to

commit suicide. Previous studies suggest a significant decline in the suicide rate for men and women, old and young, and rural and urban populations in China (Yip et al., 2005; Zhang et al., 2015). With further economic growth having taken place since these studies were conducted, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the suicidal ideation is declining as well among Chinese college students (H_1).

Although the pressure from employment has led to increasing competition in the universities, one study showed that Chinese college students' well-being actually increased from 2002 to 2017 (Su & Liu, 2020). Given the protective effects of optimism, self-esteem, and perceived social support against suicidal ideation and depression found in the literature (Carver & Scheier, 2014; Kleiman & Riskind, 2013), we expect that in our study the level of optimism, self-esteem, and perceived social support increase or at least remain relatively stable over time (H_2).

Research Approach for the Study

Participants

A survey-based questionnaire was distributed at a key university in Beijing, China. Each year since 2007, we have distributed an annual survey examining mental health and related factors among undergraduate students in this university in Beijing. Each year in October, approximately 80 undergraduate classes from 4 grades are randomly selected across all the departments (e.g., finance, accounting, management, and statistics) of the university. We then systematically sampled respondents in selected classes by approaching instructors for their consent and scheduling a time for administering the questionnaire. Students in the selected classes answered the questionnaire in groups. Given the nature of the survey, it is likely that some respondents who answered the questionnaire the first year would retake the survey in the following 2 or 3 years, which could form an unbalanced repeated cross-sectional dataset. To correct for this, we limited the retake rate to 2% so as to minimize sample selection bias over time. The current dataset therefore comprises pooled datasets with all available years, similar to previous studies (Wu & Li, 2012).

The questionnaire included demographics, interpersonal and social interaction variables, as well as indicators of mental health. The study was approved by the Institutional Research Board at the University where the research was administered. Informed consent was obtained before each student answered the questionnaire, and all the respondents were informed of their right to refuse and stop the procedure any time they wished.

Owing to the omission of the suicidal ideation scale in 2016, this study only used data from 2007 to 2015. In total, 9956 students ranging from 17 to 24 years were recruited for this current study. Two hundred and forty questionnaires were omitted on the basis of the following three principles, sociodemographic data incomplete, more than three missing values among all items, and responses showing undulating

curve or overcentralized, the latter two of which may lead to systematic errors in the measurement process and affect the validity of this study (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). This leaves a final total of 9716 valid observations. The final sample consisted of 3650 (36.7%) male and 6293 (63.3%) female students, which is consistent with the gender ratio of the university.

Instruments

We used the scale developed in Kessler's National Comorbidity Survey (NCS) to assess the respondents' *suicidal ideation* level (Kessler et al., 2005), and we used the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) to assess the respondents' *depression* level (Radloff, 1977). CES-D has 20 items, and for each of them, respondents rate their own feeling for the number of days in the past 1 week (0, less than 1 day; 1, 1 to 2 days; 2, 3 to 4 days; and 3, 5 to 7 days).

To assess the respondents' self-esteem level, we used the self-report version of the *Self-Esteem Scale* (SES) (Rosenberg, 1965). The ten items of the SES assess a person's overall evaluation of his or her worthiness as a human being. Responses were coded on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The 12-item Multidimensional Scale of *Perceived Social Support* (MSPSS) was used to assess respondents' perceived social support from family, friends, and significant others (Zimet et al., 1988). We assessed *optimism* by a single question: "Do you feel optimistic about the future?" This approach directly measures people's expectation of good outcomes.

In considering the net effect of mental health, several demographic variables were included in the analyses. According to previous studies, sex, year in school, and hometown were significant predictors for psychopathology (Mackenzie et al., 2011). Thus, those three predictors were recoded into dummy variables, as female, freshman, and rural, respectively (Table 9.1).

Findings

The total sample size was 9716, and it was roughly evenly distributed across the 9-year period. From 2007 to 2015, suicidal ideation among Chinese college students showed a significant declining trend across different groups. During the study period, the mean score of suicidal ideations decreased from 0.25 to 0.13 and from 0.24 to 0.12 for male and female students, respectively. The suicidal ideation scores in freshmen and sophomore were the highest (0.19), while scores in senior students were the lowest (0.14). From 2007 to 2015, suicidal ideation showed an average downward trend across different grades. The mean score of suicidal ideations dropped from 0.25 to 0.12 and from 0.23 to 0.13 for urban and rural college students, respectively (Table 9.2). The association between suicidal ideation and

Table 9.1 Variable descriptive statistics ($N = 9716$)

Variable	<i>f</i> / Mean	%/S.D.	Value
Gender			0 = female; 1 = male
Female	6148	63.3%	
Male	3568	36.7%	
Year in school			1 = freshman; 2 = sophomore; 3 = junior; 4 = senior
Freshman	3004	30.9%	
Sophomore	2548	26.2%	
Junior	2265	23.3%	
Senior	1899	19.6%	
Hometown			0 = rural; 1 = urban
Rural	3902	40.2%	
Urban	5814	59.8%	
Suicidal ideation			0 = no; 1 = yes
No	7985	82.18	
Yes	1731	17.82	
Depression	14.57	10.37	0 = less than 1 day; 1 = 1–2 days; 2 = 3–4 days; 3 = 5–7 days
Optimism	1.60	0.51	0 = never; 1 = sometimes; 2 = always
Self-esteem	28.87	3.87	1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree; 4 = strongly agree
Perceived social support	65.26	12.35	1 = very strongly disagree; 2 = strongly disagree; 3 = disagree; 4 = uncertainty; 5 = agree; 6 = strongly agree; 7 = very strongly agree

optimism, self-esteem, and social support was significantly negatively correlated ($r = -0.18, p < 0.001$; $r = -0.20, p < 0.01$; $r = -0.11, p < 0.001$, respectively). There was also a significant positive correlation between suicidal ideation and depression ($r = 0.30, p < 0.001$) (Table 9.3).

Trends in Rates of Suicidal Ideation and Depression

Figure 9.1 depicts how suicidal ideation has shown a significant downward trend in the past decade. In the past decade, the mean rate of suicidal ideation was between 0.13 (in 2015) and 0.24 (in 2007). No significant difference was found between males and females in changes of suicidal ideation; however, there were significant differences in suicidal ideation among students across each year (partial $\eta^2 = 0.007, p < 0.001$) and across different grades (partial $\eta^2 = 0.003; p < 0.01$) (Table 9.4).

The mean score for depression for Chinese college students in the past decade declined from 16.32 to 12.46, with a small increase period during the year of 2011 and 2012 (Fig. 9.1). We also found significant differences in depression among students across different years (partial $\eta^2 = 0.01, p < 0.001$) and from different home towns (partial $\eta^2 = 0.103, p < 0.001$) (Table 9.5).

Table 9.2 Mean rates of suicidal ideation in college students from 2007 to 2015

Year		Gender		Year in school				Hometown	
		Male	Female	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Rural	Urban
2007	Mean/r	0.25	0.24	0.25	0.23	0.26	0.21	0.23	0.25
	f%	350 (36.4%)	611 (63.6%)	280 (29.1%)	273 (28.4%)	218 (22.7%)	190 (19.8%)	417 (43.4%)	544 (56.6%)
2008	Mean/r	0.22	0.2	0.19	0.23	0.22	0.2	0.19	0.22
	f%	315 (36.7%)	543 (63.3%)	224 (26.2%)	238 (27.7%)	219 (25.5%)	177 (20.6%)	359 (41.8%)	499 (58.2%)
2009	Mean/r	0.19	0.21	0.24	0.24	0.18	0.13	0.21	0.2
	f%	282 (36.9%)	483 (63.1%)	267 (34.9%)	154 (20.1%)	179 (23.4%)	165 (21.6%)	300 (39.2%)	465 (60.8%)
2010	Mean/r	0.15	0.17	0.16	0.17	0.15	0.17	0.17	0.16
	f%	413 (39.3%)	638 (61.7%)	301 (28.6%)	300 (28.5%)	253 (24.1%)	197 (18.8%)	355 (33.8%)	696 (66.2%)
2011	Mean/r	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.19	0.2	0.13	0.18	0.18
	f%	696 (37.1%)	1181 (62.9%)	525 (28.0%)	497 (26.5%)	484 (25.7%)	371 (19.8%)	721 (38.4%)	1156 (61.6%)
2012	Mean/r	0.18	0.19	0.24	0.18	0.15	0.12	0.18	0.18
	n%	471 (38.5%)	751 (61.5%)	363 (29.7%)	346 (28.3%)	323 (26.4%)	190 (15.6%)	457 (37.4%)	765 (62.6%)
2013	Mean/r	0.17	0.2	0.21	0.21	0.17	0.13	0.21	0.17
	n%	341 (35.0%)	633 (65.0%)	321 (33.0%)	310 (31.8%)	192 (19.7%)	151 (15.5%)	390 (40.0%)	584 (60.0%)
2014	Mean/r	0.13	0.13	0.15	0.16	0.13	0.07	0.12	0.14
	n%	335 (36.5%)	582 (63.5%)	350 (38.2%)	177 (19.3%)	187 (20.4%)	203 (22.1%)	406 (44.3%)	511 (55.7%)
2015	Mean/r	0.13	0.12	0.15	0.13	0.13	0.08	0.13	0.12
	n%	365 (33.5%)	726 (66.5%)	373 (34.2%)	253 (23.2%)	210 (19.2%)	255 (23.4%)	497 (45.6%)	594 (54.4%)
All	Mean/r	0.18	0.18	0.19	0.19	0.18	0.14	0.18	0.18
	n%	3568 (36.7%)	6148 (63.3%)	3004 (30.9%)	2548 (26.2%)	2265 (23.4%)	1899 (19.5%)	3902 (40.2%)	5814 (59.8%)

Table 9.3 Correlations between suicidal ideation and optimism, self-esteem, depression, and perceived social support

Year	Depression	Optimism	Self-esteem	Perceived social support
2007	0.299***	-0.182***	-0.199***	-0.113***
2008	0.234***	-0.120***	-0.121***	-0.072*
2009	0.228***	-0.116***	-0.170***	-0.083*
2010	0.187***	-0.163***	-0.121***	0.006
2011	0.254***	-0.208***	-0.161***	-0.097***
2012	0.238***	-0.138***	-0.177***	-0.101***
2013	0.215***	-0.180***	-0.142***	-0.116***
2014	0.242***	-0.162***	-0.181***	-0.175***
2015	0.254**	-0.163***	-0.164***	-0.203***
All	0.246***	-0.169***	-0.160***	-0.107***

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

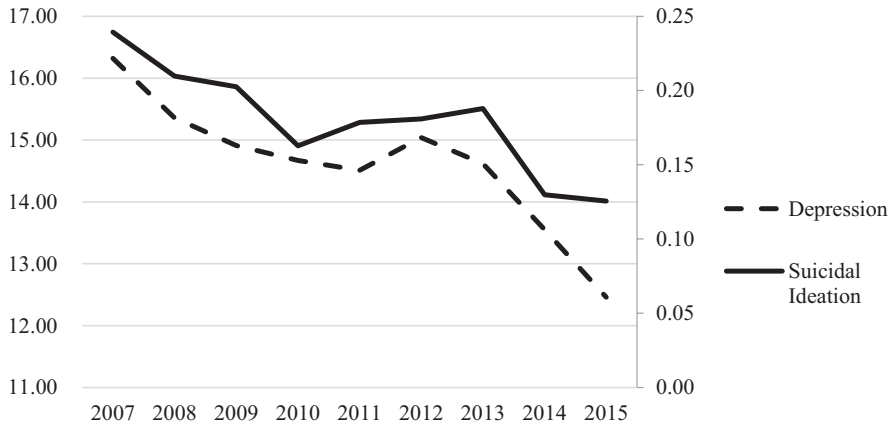


Fig. 9.1 The trend of suicidal ideation and depression from 2007 to 2015

Trends in Optimism, Self-Esteem, and Perceived Social Support

The trend of the optimism among Chinese college students in the past decade suggested that optimism increased from 1.53 to 1.66 (Fig. 9.2). Male students indicated greater rates of optimism than females, and urban students rated higher in optimism than did rural students ($p < 0.001$). There were significant differences in the optimism of students in different grades, and the scores in senior students were highest among different grades ($p < 0.001$) (Table 9.6).

From 2007 to 2015, the score of self-esteem maintained a high relatively stable level (Fig. 9.2). We found significant differences in the levels of self-esteem among students of different years, sex, grades, and hometown ($p < 0.05$) (Table 9.6). But trends in perceived social support were relatively stable with the exception of 2013 (Table 9.7).

We conducted multiple regression analyses to examine demographic factors and psychological variables as they relate to suicidal ideation among college students (Table 9.8). In all models, the negative coefficients for 8 years indicated that the trend of suicidal ideation declined over the past decade. This is consistent with the 9-year trend of suicidal ideation (Fig. 9.1). The results showed no significant difference in suicidal ideation across sex and hometown ($p > 0.05$). However, seniors showed a significant decline in suicidal ideation compared to freshmen ($p < 0.001$). This finding is consistent with previous studies, which showed that students’ suicidal ideation had a downward trend in the age range of 19–22 years old (Rueter & Kwon, 2010).

When depression was added as a variable in Model 3, we observed that students who reported high depression levels also had higher suicidal ideation rates than those students who reported low depression levels ($B = 0.15, p < 0.001$). After adding perceived social support, self-esteem, and optimism into the model, Model 7

Table 9.4 Suicidal ideation and depression in college students from 2007 to 2015

		Suicidal ideation				Depression				
Year	Cohen's d/η^2	Has the subject seriously thought about death?	Has the subject thought about death in the past 12 months?	Has the subject made plans about suicide in the past 12 months?	Has the subject attempted suicide in the past 12 months?	Cohen's d/η^2	Year	Low (≤ 16)	High (> 16)	
		<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>					Mean
	0.007 ^{***}					0.006 ^{***}				
2007		229	102	14	2		2007	16.32	56.90%	43.10%
2008		180	80	10	2		2008	15.36	60.10%	39.90%
2009		155	69	7	0		2009	14.91	61.80%	38.20%
2010		171	72	5	1		2010	14.67	62.20%	37.80%
2011		335	149	26	9		2011	14.51	63.10%	36.90%
2012		221	110	13	9		2012	15.04	62.40%	37.60%
2013		172	70	15	9		2013	14.62	62.90%	37.10%
2014		110	51	16	8		2014	13.55	67.60%	32.40%
2015		122	48	6	8		2015	12.46	70.90%	29.10%

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

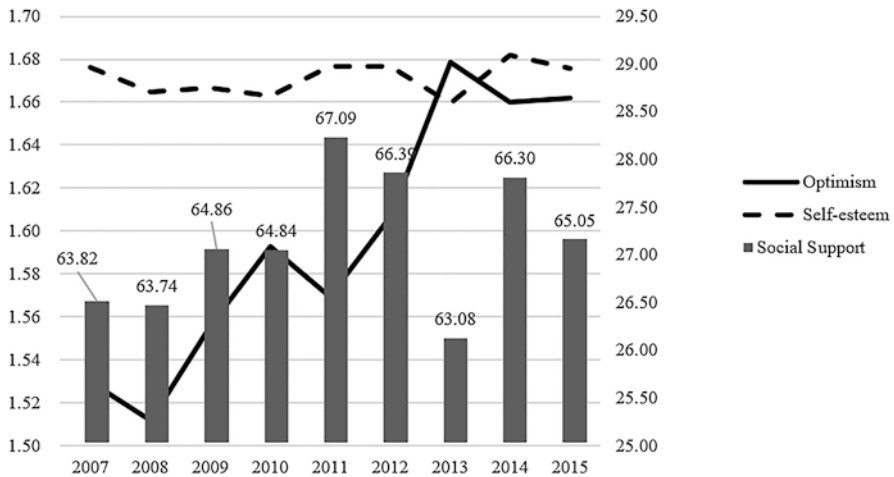


Fig. 9.2 Trends in optimism, self-esteem, and perceived social support from 2007 to 2015

showed that while depression was positively related to suicidal ideation, optimism, self-esteem, and perceived social support showed positive protective effects, which contribute to the downward trends in suicidal ideation.

Discussion and Implications

The data we collected in this study explored the changes of suicidal ideation, depression, optimism, self-esteem, and perceived social support for Chinese college students during 2007–2015. Findings have implications for families given the Chinese context. According to the family integration dimension of Durkheim’s theory of suicide, the personalization of ties and the increasing intervention of the state in family affairs weaken rules and discipline within the family and thus may be associated with lower levels of social integration. Therefore, individuals who were not well integrated into society, such as unmarried people, had little social support and are at increased risk of suicide. The current study indicated that economic changes for college students are linked to the economics of their family. With China’s fast-growing economy, people’s life has significantly improved from extreme poverty to being enough in terms of food, clothing, and shelter. Both urban and rural families believe that obtaining a higher education degree can bring high income and a good life. Urban parents have gained spiritual comfort in raising their children to become university students. In contrast, rural families are more likely to expect their children to become college students in order to feedback their families after they graduate.

There is no significant difference in suicidal ideation between males and females in our study, which is consistent with recent findings (Zhang et al., 2016).

Table 9.6 Optimism and self-esteem in college students from 2007 to 2015

Optimism		Self-esteem												
	Cohen's d/η^2	Mean	S.D.	Never	Sometimes	Always		Cohen's d/η^2	Mean	S.D.	Very High (35-40)	High (30-34)	Moderate (20-29)	Low (≤ 19)
Year	0.011***						Year	0.002						
2007		1.53	0.53	1.8%	43.5%	54.7%	2007		28.97	3.87	8.1%	32.0%	58.3%	1.6%
2008		1.51	0.53	1.5%	45.8%	52.7%	2008		28.71	3.87	8.9%	28.2%	62.0%	0.9%
2009		1.56	0.51	0.7%	43.1%	56.2%	2009		28.75	3.95	8.8%	27.7%	61.8%	1.7%
2010		1.59	0.53	1.8%	37.1%	61.1%	2010		28.67	3.6	6.2%	27.2%	65.6%	1.0%
2011		1.57	0.52	1.3%	40.5%	58.2%	2011		28.97	3.92	8.8%	32.3%	57.5%	1.4%
2012		1.61	0.52	1.8%	35.8%	62.4%	2012		28.98	3.74	7.9%	32.3%	59.4%	0.4%
2013		1.68	0.48	0.8%	30.5%	68.7%	2013		28.59	3.81	7.9%	27.0%	64.3%	0.8%
2014		1.66	0.49	0.9%	32.3%	66.8%	2014		29.1	4.05	10.4%	31.2%	57.3%	1.2%
2015		1.66	0.49	0.6%	32.5%	66.8%	2015		28.96	3.94	10.3%	27.4%	61.7%	0.6%
Gender	0.078***						Gender	0.052*						
Male		1.62	0.52	1.9%	33.9%	64.2%	Male		29	3.96	9.7%	30.7%	58.3%	1.3%
Female		1.58	0.51	0.9%	40.1%	59.0%	Female		28.8	3.81	7.9%	29.3%	61.9%	0.9%
Year in school	0.003**						Year in school	0.003						
Freshman		1.59	0.52	1.2%	39.1%	59.7%	Freshman		29	4	9.9%	29.8%	59.1%	1.2%
Sophomore		1.58	0.52	1.2%	39.1%	59.7%	Sophomore		28.59	3.72	6.8%	28.3%	63.9%	1.1%
Junior		1.57	0.53	1.6%	39.2%	59.1%	Junior		28.75	3.74	7.5%	29.8%	61.8%	0.9%
Senior		1.66	0.5	1.1%	32.3%	66.6%	Senior		29.18	3.96	10.0%	31.9%	57.1%	1.1%
Hometown	0.116***						Hometown	0.183***						
Urban		1.62	0.51	1.2%	35.6%	63.2%	Urban		29.15	3.94	9.8%	32.0%	57.1%	1.1%
Rural		1.56	0.52	1.4%	41.2%	57.4%	Rural		28.45	3.71	6.7%	26.6%	65.7%	1.1%

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 9.7 Perceived social support among college students from 2007 to 2015

	Cohen's d/η^2	Mean	S.D.	High	Low
				(≥ 50)	(≤ 49)
Year	0.012***				
2007		63.82	10.53	91.4%	8.6%
2008		63.74	11.51	90.7%	9.3%
2009		64.86	11.68	90.7%	9.3%
2010		64.84	11.76	90.5%	9.5%
2011		67.09	12.17	92.8%	7.2%
2012		66.39	13.06	91.3%	8.7%
2013		63.08	14.05	86.8%	13.2%
2014		66.3	13.28	90.3%	9.7%
2015		65.05	11.94	91.3%	8.7%
Gender	0.223***				
Male		63.49	13.42	86.9%	13.1%
Female		66.29	11.56	93.1%	6.9%
Year in school	0.002				
Freshman		65.86	12.1	91.8%	8.2%
Sophomore		64.96	12.36	90.7%	9.3%
Junior		64.63	12.43	89.8%	10.2%
Senior		65.45	12.59	90.8%	9.2%
Hometown	0.195***				
Urban		66.22	12.45	91.6%	8.4%
Rural		63.83	12.06	89.7%	10.3%

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The results may be attributed to successful education for gender egalitarianism as well as increasingly gender egalitarian family environments in China. It also could be the characteristics of the sample in this study, that is, full-time college students aged between 17 and 24 years. Other populations rather than college students may have different results (Sun & Zhang, 2016).

We also found that year in school was associated with decreased suicidal ideation, with freshmen reporting greater suicidal ideation than students in any other grades, although rates for freshmen decrease at the same rate over time as overall rates. Entering university is a stressful experience for many students as it involves a multitude of new academic, personal, and interpersonal challenges. First-year students must adapt to new approaches when teaching and learning in a new environment, as well as compete with peers. While they are establishing a new lifestyle and social network with new teachers and classmates, they are dealing with issues relating to their changing role in a new environment, as well as establishing one's identity and personal values. With so many new experiences, feelings of hopelessness may arise and have been identified as a common factor of suicide among in rural Chinese samples (Zhang & Jia, 2011). However, as college students progress through grades, they are likely to become more familiar with their college life.

Table 9.8 Multiple regression models for suicidal ideation

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
	<i>B</i> (S.E.)	<i>B</i> (S.E.)	<i>B</i> (S.E.)	<i>B</i> (S.E.)	<i>B</i> (S.E.)	<i>B</i> (S.E.)	<i>B</i> (S.E.)
Year							
2007	–						
2008	–0.030 (0.018)	–0.028 (0.018)	–0.024 (0.018)	–0.029 (0.018)	–0.033 (0.018)	–0.030 (0.018)	–0.028 (0.017)
2009	–0.037* (0.018)	–0.036 (0.018)	–0.029 (0.018)	–0.037* (0.018)	–0.040* (0.018)	–0.033 (0.018)	–0.032 (0.018)
2010	–0.077*** (0.017)	–0.077*** (0.017)	–0.069*** (0.017)	–0.078*** (0.017)	–0.083*** (0.017)	–0.070*** (0.017)	–0.072*** (0.017)
2011	–0.061*** (0.015)	–0.060*** (0.015)	–0.051** (0.015)	–0.059*** (0.015)	–0.061*** (0.015)	–0.056*** (0.015)	–0.052*** (0.015)
2012	–0.058*** (0.016)	–0.060*** (0.016)	–0.052** (0.016)	–0.060*** (0.016)	–0.060*** (0.016)	–0.052** (0.016)	–0.051** (0.016)
2013	–0.051*** (0.017)	–0.054** (0.017)	–0.045** (0.017)	–0.060*** (0.017)	–0.060*** (0.017)	–0.036* (0.017)	–0.044** (0.017)
2014	–0.110*** (0.018)	–0.109*** (0.018)	–0.094*** (0.017)	–0.111*** (0.018)	–0.108*** (0.017)	–0.094*** (0.017)	–0.091*** (0.017)
2015	–0.114*** (0.017)	–0.113*** (0.017)	–0.092*** (0.017)	–0.113*** (0.017)	–0.113*** (0.017)	–0.097*** (0.017)	–0.091*** (0.016)
Gender							
Male	–						
Female		–0.003 (0.008)	0.001 (0.008)	–0.011 (0.008)	0.001 (0.008)	0.001 (0.008)	–0.001 (0.008)
Year in school							
Freshman	–						
Sophomore		–0.008 (0.010)	–0.013 (0.010)	–0.009 (0.010)	–0.014 (0.010)	–0.007 (0.010)	–0.014 (0.010)
Junior		–0.020 (0.011)	–0.022* (0.010)	–0.023* (0.011)	–0.024* (0.011)	–0.020 (0.011)	–0.025* (0.011)
Senior		–0.058*** (0.011)	–0.059*** (0.011)	–0.060*** (0.011)	–0.056*** (0.011)	–0.050*** (0.011)	–0.054*** (0.011)
Hometown							
Rural	–						
Urban		–0.001 (0.008)	0.005 (0.008)	0.001 (0.008)	0.010 (0.008)	0.006 (0.008)	0.013 (0.008)
Depression							
Low	–						
High			0.150*** (0.008)				0.096*** (0.009)
Perceived social support							
Low	–						
High				–0.119*** (0.013)			–0.048*** (0.014)

(continued)

Table 9.8 (continued)

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
	<i>B</i> (S.E.)	<i>B</i> (S.E.)	<i>B</i> (S.E.)	<i>B</i> (S.E.)	<i>B</i> (S.E.)	<i>B</i> (S.E.)	<i>B</i> (S.E.)
Self-esteem					−0.016*** (0.001)		−0.007*** (0.001)
Optimism	–						
Low							
Moderate						−0.206*** (0.035)	−0.155*** (0.034)
High						−0.320*** (0.034)	−0.212*** (0.035)
Constant	0.239*** (0.012)	0.259*** (0.015)	0.193*** (0.015)	0.371*** (0.019)	0.711*** (0.032)	0.517*** (0.037)	0.638 (0.048)
Adjust <i>R</i> ²	0.007	0.009	0.044	0.017	0.034	0.035	0.060
<i>F</i>	8.961	7.843	33.081	12.925	25.459	24.790	35.419
<i>N</i>	9716	9716	9716	9716	9716	9716	9716

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

In addition, perceived social support gained from daily life might also increase students' abilities to cope with tough work demands, and thus, potential feelings of hopelessness may diminish, leading to reductions in suicidal ideation.

Our investigation found trends of declining rates of both suicidal ideation and depression among Chinese college students, suggesting that declines in this psychopathology coincide with increased optimism, and relatively stable self-esteem, and perceived social support. Consistent with past findings for suicidal ideation based on college student samples (Zhang et al., 2013), our correlational results indicated that over a decade's period, the sampled Chinese college students experienced a decline of suicidal ideation, whereas their optimistic feelings significantly went up over the decade. Similar findings have also been documented in other studies with either national or provincial level data of China (Zhang et al., 2015; Zhang & Zhao, 2017).

According to Carver et al. (1989; see also optimists expect the best for a wide range of reasons, from those due to internal factors (e.g., self-esteem) to those due to external factors (e.g., chance). Therefore, explanations of the change may be found in the rapid growth of the Chinese economy in the past 40 or so years. Along with increased income and improved daily life, Chinese people including Chinese college students became direct beneficiaries of the wealth and therefore much optimistic about their life and the future of their infrastructure. Increased optimism and life satisfaction reduced the strains that resulted from unmet aspiration and therefore decreased the risk of depression as well as suicidality (Zhao & Zhang, 2018; Zhao et al., 2020).

Indeed, previous empirical studies have also shown that the economic upturn, high levels of perceived social support, and reduction of strain contribute to lower incidences of mental problems (Zhang & Lv, 2014). Thus, against the backdrop of rapid economic development and the continued improvement in living standards, Chinese college students can enjoy a relatively good education, better living environment, and quality of life that may reduce suicidal ideation and depression.

Summary

In this study, we investigated how several mental health outcomes among Chinese college students have changed in the past decade. Our analysis suggested that the suicidal ideation and depression are declining among Chinese college students, while optimism is increasing and the trend of self-esteem and perceived social support are relatively stable. These findings demonstrate that in the context of economic growth, stabilizing and improving positive mental health states can help prevent and reduce the risk of depression and suicidal ideation among college students. One way to do this is to strengthen strong ties with family members as to receive social support. In fact, Chinese college students tend to continue strong bonds with their relatives, particularly with their extended family. Close ties among families continue despite the fact that networks are increasingly conducted at long distances and visiting relatives often include significant travel and communicating with relatives is often via social media. This is because in Chinese culture, people hold the family bonds as sacred and honor them accordingly. The study also highlighted the need for more public health campaigns and interventions in universities using optimized prevention strategies to help students cope with mental health problems.

This investigation is limited in its inclusion of sociodemographic variables due to changes in the questionnaires used throughout the years. Further multivariate analyses with the inclusion of age group, urban residence, and social class would make the study stronger. Although we are trying to attribute the mental health outcome changes in China to the economic growth, it is limited in evaluating the macro-level data in this study. Later studies may include macro-level economic variables, such as unemployment rate and proportion of the elderly in the population, to establish the pattern of changes and explain the phenomenon. Despite these limitations, our study highlights the declining rates of suicidal ideation and depression, combined with relative stability and even small increases in optimism, self-esteem, and perceived social support across a range of demographic variables. In the years to come, more data will be accumulated into the existing ones, and we will be more confident in explaining the unusual changes within the Chinese cultural contexts.

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Chapter 10

Experiences with Family Violence in Early Adolescence: Global Evidence from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys



Spencer L. James and Jane Rose Njue

Family violence is a global issue that affects millions of people worldwide, and it is increasingly recognized as a public health problem by governments, NGOs, and multilateral organizations such as the World Health Organization. Over the past several decades, work on family violence has emphasized intimate partner violence, physical and sexual abuse of children and adolescents, marital rape, and domestic homicide, among other topics. Despite this considerable effort, however, much of the work on the topic comes from wealthy, industrialized countries such as those in North America and Europe (Smith-Marek et al., 2015). In this chapter, we argue that the study of family violence is crucial to understanding its causes and effects and use a global approach to examine patterns of family violence among early adolescents across 21 countries in 7 world regions, including West and Central Africa (Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin), Eastern and Southern Africa (Somalia, Kenya, Zimbabwe), South Asia (Nepal, Afghanistan, Pakistan), East Asia (Thailand, Vietnam, Laos), the Middle East and North Africa (Sudan, Tunisia, Iraq), Latin America and the Caribbean (Dominican Republic, Mexico, Guyana), and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Moldova). We highlight theories of family violence as well as its impact on individuals and society, including its cost in terms of lost productivity, poor educational attainment, diminished wages, job loss, debt, and housing instability. Using data from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, we adopt a descriptive approach to understand how family violence plays out on a global scale. Further, we demonstrate how sociodemographic factors

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(household wealth, maternal education, residence, adolescent sex, adolescent age, and household living arrangements) impact family violence indicators. In so doing, we pay particular attention to which countries demonstrate statistically significant differences within each sociodemographic factor for each of the four family violence indicators (physical violence, psychological aggression, parental support for corporal punishment, and parental support for intimate partner violence (IPV)) as well as which, if any, countries show consistent differences across all four indicators while also pointing out any unexpected or counterintuitive findings.

The Impact of Family Violence Around the World

The shadow of family violence spreads well beyond the physical and emotional scars it inflicts on victims, extending to massive costs to the social and economic fabric of society. Globally, this cost is estimated to run into the tens, perhaps hundreds, of billions of dollars (Krug et al., 2002). In the United States, the cost of treatment alone runs into billions (McLean & Bocinski, 2017), with billions more when accounting for lost productivity, the cost to law enforcement, poor educational attainment, diminished wages, job loss, debt, and housing instability. Violence against children and adolescents in South Africa in 2015 cost the state nearly 5% of GDP, and concomitant ills such as drug abuse, interpersonal violence, and anxiety could be further reduced by 10–25% if family violence were alleviated (Hsiao et al., 2018). Consequently, nongovernmental agencies and the World Health Organization (World Health Organization, 2020) increasingly view family violence as a public health problem. The need to eradicate this societal scourge is critical, both to mitigate the more proximal consequences of violence and to curb the social and economic costs that undermine communities and societies.

Global estimates suggest that up to one billion children between the ages of 2 and 17 years old have experienced some form of violence, neglect, or emotional abuse in the past year. However, studies also show that this unfortunate phenomenon can also be prevented, particularly through healthy and close family relationships, which are an often underappreciated protective factor against the development of mental health issues for children and adolescents (Bunston et al., 2017). While health and social support systems tend to prioritize individual trauma and pathologize conditions, they often overlook the importance of the relational contexts in which these pathologies occur (*ibid.*). As a result, experts have urged a deeper investigation into family units as both the source and the solution to most violence. In South Africa, evidence suggests that a family-centered approach is critical to the assessment, treatment, and prevention of domestic violence (Jamieson et al., 2018). Focusing on the family unit rather than pathologizing individual members allows us to address underlying issues by working with the primary mechanism through which social change is likely to occur (*ibid.*).

Of course, family violence does not occur in isolation. Public conflict such as war and internecine strife often leads to higher levels of domestic and family

violence even after the public conflict has ended (Sriskandarajah et al., 2015). This problem is further exacerbated by cumulative stress, particularly for those exposed to both environmental violence and abusive family relationships, which can increase the probability that children and adolescents experience posttraumatic stress disorder (Catani et al., 2008). Ending family violence, therefore, must be viewed as a state obligation and an obligation under human rights law (Bradley, 2018).

Recently, more adolescents have been put at risk by COVID-19 lockdowns, necessary for public health but also leading to rapid increases in family violence. Lockdowns left many women and children vulnerable with fewer options for social, economic, and psychological support (Usher et al., 2020), ultimately leading to a “perfect storm” for creating situations ripe for family violence. Mental health professionals should seek to be ready to assist, and governments must create a plan for dealing with the fallout (Usher et al., 2021).

As child abuse becomes increasingly common, so too do its subsequent effects. US evidence indicates that early exposure to family violence, especially when pervasive, is associated with increased risk of psychopathology and related outcomes (Briggs-Gowan et al., 2019) and that Emirati children who experienced family violence exhibited lower levels of social and psychological adaptation (Al Majali & Alsrehan, 2019). In addition, exposure to different forms of family violence leads to different behavioral changes in children (Maikovich et al., 2008; Renner & Boel-Studt, 2017). Multiple forms of violence during childhood increase the risk of subsequent behavior problems, and witnessing violence between parents can be just as damaging as being a direct victim (Sternberg et al., 2006). Family violence has also been linked to poor academic performance among adolescents in the United States and Norway (Supol et al., 2021) and is associated with both perpetration and victimization of violence among Chinese adolescents (Xia et al., 2018). Qualitative evidence further suggests that children experience family violence as “complex, isolating, and enduring” and disruptive of significant relationships (Noble-Carr et al., 2020, p. 182).

These negative family violence effects persist into adulthood. Dutch children who experienced family violence reported increased risk of intimate partner violence and child neglect in future generations (Lünnemann et al., 2019), whereas Australian women who experienced childhood abuse and IPV as mothers reported more depressive symptoms and had children with higher odds of emotional/behavioral difficulties (Gartland et al., 2019). Australian adolescents who experience parental IPV were also more likely to become violent themselves (Meyer et al., 2021). Finally, experiencing violence in one’s family of origin is consistently linked to higher likelihood of both perpetration and victimization of IPV in adulthood, with the association being stronger for males with perpetration and stronger for females with victimization (Smith-Marek et al., 2015). These findings suggest that early interventions on multiple risk factors may help mitigate the effects of family violence and alleviate related future outcomes.

Theories of Family Violence

Many theories help explain the causes and consequences of family violence. In this study, we employ three main types of theories to explain variations in levels of family violence around the world. These include social theories, cumulative stress theories, and family systems theories.

Social theories of family violence focus on how violence is created and fostered through dyadic and group interactions (Hyde-Nolan & Juliao, 2012), with the motivation for engaging in violence depending on social dynamics. These theories suggest that family violence could emerge due to the need for powerful family members to control the less powerful (control theory), due to the use of violence and wealth as resources to resolve conflicts (resource theory), or because of life stressors outstripping individual resources to cope with changes (exosystem factor theory). Additionally, family violence, particularly when directed toward children and adolescents, may be linked to a lack of social support within and for the family (social isolation theory) (Hyde-Nolan & Juliao, 2012).

Cumulative stress theories, on the other hand, focus on how family violence can be understood as a result of the cumulative impact of various stressors, whether acute or chronic, over time (Hyde-Nolan & Juliao, 2012). These stressors may include poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other factors that increase the risk of family violence occurring. Thus, family violence, including physical violence, psychological control, parental support for corporal punishment, and parental support for intimate partner violence, can be understood as a result of accumulated stressors that overwhelm a person's ability to cope effectively, leading to increased tension and conflict in the family. This tension can escalate into violence if family members lack resources and coping strategies.

Finally, family systems theory suggests that family violence is a family-level problem rather than just a function of the survivor-abuser relationship and is situated in larger social systems (Hyde-Nolan & Juliao, 2012). Family violence can occur at any stage of the family life course but is thought to happen more often at transition points between stages as families attempt to adjust to change. By viewing individuals as part of the larger family unit, this theory helps to explain how changes within and between family members affect the system and each individual member.

By integrating all three theories together, we can understand that family violence among early adolescents is likely to occur in situations where there are social and familial underpinnings that make it more likely, where cumulative stressors have built up over time, and where family dynamics are shifting as the family moves through different stages of the family life cycle. Family violence, per social theories, may be more likely to happen among families facing economic hardship and social disadvantage due to fewer coping resources. Families with high levels of acute or chronic stress will likely experience an increased risk of violence, per cumulative stress theories, so rural families or families with limited resources may face additional stressors linked to social isolation and lack of access to services. Family

dynamics and power imbalances within the family may also lead to violence, as family systems theory suggests. Adolescents whose mothers have greater levels of education or whose families have greater wealth may also have more egalitarian family dynamics and better communication, reducing the chances of family violence. Adolescent age and sex may also matter, as all three theories suggest, because younger adolescents may be more vulnerable to abuse due to their dependence on caregivers and girls due to gender discrimination. Further, all three theories suggest that single-parent households may face greater stress, leading to a higher risk of violence, whereas adolescents in extended family households may benefit from the stability and extra caregivers such households often provide. Overall, integrating the three theories suggests the complexities inherent in the factors that shape family violence. While each theory has its own strengths and weaknesses, together, they provide a strong theoretical understanding of family violence that is generalizable to many cultures around the world.

Sociodemographic Factors

Because we assess family violence by a variety of sociodemographic factors, we briefly outline our expectations for how family violence is likely to be associated with each sociodemographic factor.

Household Wealth

We expected early adolescents from poorer households to be at a greater risk of violence in their families for several reasons, including financial strain (can create family stress), lack of resources (inability to access services and resources such as mental health services and other community resources), limited education and employment opportunities (may lead to feeling of frustration and hopelessness), and exposure to community violence (normalizing violence and acceptance of violent behaviors). However, using social theories of family violence, one may predict wealth to be associated with higher levels of violence because wealth can be used as means of social control, violence being one manifestation thereof.

Maternal Education

Our general expectation was that early adolescents of poorly educated mothers would be more likely to experience family violence for several reasons, including limited access to information and resources (such information could help manage

stress, which can lead to violence as a form of discipline, and develop parenting skills) and economic distress (limited opportunities and low wages).

Residence

The relationship between family violence and region of residence is complex. Our soft expectation, therefore, was that family violence is likely higher in rural areas due to higher social isolation (increased social and geographic distance between support systems), greater economic stress (fewer economic opportunities, higher levels of poverty), more traditional gender roles (prevalence of strict, misogynistic gender roles), and limited access to services (difficulty for victims to leave abusive relationship or seek help).

Child Sex

A priori, we might expect that girls will be more likely than boys to be vulnerable to violence within their families for several reasons, including gender inequality and discrimination (girls being devalued and seen as inferior to boys), adherence to traditional gender roles (caring for younger siblings and performing household tasks can make them vulnerable to more powerful family members), and societal acceptance toward gender-based violence (normalizing violence against women and girls, making it difficult to seek and find help). However, past research has shown that boys may be more at risk of physical violence than girls.

Child Age

Although the developmental stage examined here is somewhat narrow (5 years between the ages of 10 and 14), there are several reasons why a younger adolescent (10 or 11) may experience more family violence than an older (13 or 14) and why the reverse may be true (13- or 14-year-olds at greater risk of family violence). At younger ages, for instance, limited physical size and strength as well as greater developmental reliance on adults could potentially make younger adolescents more susceptible to family violence. On the other hand, increased independence and assertiveness could lead to greater family stress and violence, along with accompanying physical and hormonal changes that could lead to escalation and perhaps family violence. Given the contradictory expectations, we did not have prior expectations, thinking perhaps the contradicting reasons for family violence may cancel out, resulting in few, if any, significant differences.

Household Living Arrangements

Setting expectations for differences in family violence by household living arrangement is difficult given the complexities associated with household living arrangements around the world. For instance, research in industrialized nations consistently shows that adolescents who live with only one parent may be more likely to experience family violence due to higher levels of stress, greater parental absence, and more economic strain when compared to adolescents whose parents both live in the household. On the other hand, adolescents who live in extended families may actually be better off compared to adolescents who live with both parents but no other extended family due to greater social support (wider network of relatives to provide support), shared responsibility for childcare (reducing the burden on individual parents and less conflict and violence), and stronger cultural values and norms (many countries value and respect extended family living arrangements, creating a cultural context in which family violence is less acceptable). In all families, factors such as poverty, stress, substance abuse, and mental health issues can increase the risk of family violence.

Method and Data

Data come from adolescents aged 10–14, an age range defined by the United Nations as early adolescence, in 21 countries from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) administered by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) between 2010 and 2017. The MICS are household surveys developed by UNICEF in partnership with the countries administering the surveys.

We selected countries from the MICS that could furnish data across each of the selected indicators on family violence. While it was impractical to include all available countries in the MICS dataset, the countries selected ensured regional representation across income and developmental levels that accounted for a significant portion of the global population. At the same time, we made a purposeful effort to include countries that generally receive less attention, such as Moldova, Benin, Nepal, Laos, Guyana, and Kazakhstan, than some of their larger neighbors.

We examined four dependent variables: physical violence, psychological aggression, parental support for corporal punishment, and parental support for intimate partner violence. The first three come from a series of questions from the Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scale, validated across low- and middle-income countries (Lee & Boyle, 2021) and called the disciplinary-practices module. One child per household between the ages of 2–14 was selected for the module. Because only one child per household was selected for the child discipline module, resulting in a lower inclusion probability of adolescents from larger families, we multiplied the household weight by the number of adolescents aged 10–14 in the household, consistent with prior work. In a final weighting step, we also adjusted the household

survey weights for country population size, using age data from the United Nations World Population Prospects, so that countries with larger samples (but not larger populations) could not overly influence the findings.

Caregivers were asked whether they or any other adult in the household had used the various methods for disciplining the child in the past 30 days. These methods were then categorized into nonaggressive (took away privileges, explained why the behavior was wrong, gave something else to do), physical violence (shook child; spanked, hit, or slapped child on bottom; hit or slapped the child on the face, head, or ears; hit or slapped child on the hand, arm, or leg; hit child repeatedly as hard as one could), and psychological aggression (shouted, yelled at, or screamed at child, called child dumb, lazy, or another similar name). The child module also asked whether the caregiver believes that, to bring up, raise, or educate a child properly, the child needs to be physically punished, which we employed as our measure of parental support for corporal punishment. Our final measure of adolescent violence, parental support for intimate partner violence, comes from questions asked of the child's primary caregiver about whether they believed a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife in certain situations, including if she goes out without telling him, neglects the children, argues with him, refuses to have sex with him, or burns the food.

All questions were coded as 1 *yes* and 0 *no*. We constructed dichotomous indicators where 1 meant that the child (or the caregiver in the case of parental support items) scored a 1 on any of the questions for physical violence, psychological aggression, and parental support for corporal punishment, consistent with prior research using the same module (Lee & Boyle, 2021). Adolescents whose caregivers said that wife beating was justified in any of the five cases were also coded as 1 for parental support for intimate partner violence.

The independent variables included the household wealth quintile, constructed by UNICEF, indicating whether the child's household was in the bottom, second, middle, fourth, or highest quintile in terms of wealth. Maternal education indicated whether the child's mother's level of education was 0 *unknown*, 1 *none*, 2 *primary*, or 3 *secondary or more*. Residence was coded as 1 *urban* and 2 *rural*. Child sex was 1 *male* and 2 *female*, whereas age indicated the age of the child between ages 10 and 14. Finally, we examined household living arrangements, where 0 *both parents live in the household*, 1 *mother only in the household*, 2 *father only in the household*, or 3 *neither parent in the household*. We chose not to distinguish further household living arrangements based on data availability and the complex nature of household living arrangements around the world, but we note that 86% of adolescents who reportedly lived with neither parent were living with either grandparents (54%), siblings (9%), an aunt or uncle (15%), or another relative. That is, these are almost entirely extended family households.

Following previous work on family violence using the MICS datasets (Lee & Boyle, 2021), we employed the *svy* command suite in Stata to account for the multistage stratified cluster sampling survey design. The pooled sample included 72,389 adolescents aged 10–14. Some adolescents were excluded due to missing data on parental support for corporal punishment and parental support for intimate partner

violence. Our final sample for the binary logistic regression analyses varied between 72,389 adolescents for physical violence and psychological aggression, 70,562 adolescents for parental support for corporal punishment, and 72,221 adolescents for parental support for intimate partner violence.

Our analytical approach involves several steps. First, we examine differences in family violence among families with adolescents by comparing compositional differences both within and between countries. We then examine these differences across each independent variable separately. As a final step, we employ binary logistic regression analyses to examine which independent variables are consistently linked to each indicator of family violence.

Results

We first provide descriptive statistics for each family violence indicator by country, including the year of data collection for each country sample and the abbreviation used in the figures for each country (Table 10.1). These proportions (adjusted for sampling weights and stratification using Stata's *svy* command) are graphed for visual purposes in Fig. 10.1. These are, in turn, ordered by world region (the x-axis), while the proportion of adolescents experiencing family violence in that country is on the y-axis. Note that each point on each figure is labeled with the three-letter country abbreviation. The country corresponding to each abbreviation can be found in Table 10.1. In the interest of consistency and comparability and for ease of interpretation, the y-axes for all graphs begin at 0, indicating that no adolescents reported experiencing that type of family violence, to 1, indicating that all (100%) early adolescents reported experiencing that particular type of violence in their family.

Throughout the results section, we focus our research questions on how sociodemographic factors (household wealth, maternal education, residence, adolescent sex, adolescent age, and household living arrangements) impact family violence indicators. In so doing, we pay particular attention to which countries demonstrate statistically significant differences within each sociodemographic factor for each of the four family violence indicators (physical violence, psychological aggression, parental support for corporal punishment, and parental support for intimate partner violence (IPV)) as well as which, if any, countries show consistent differences across all four indicators while also pointing out any unexpected or counter-intuitive findings.

We begin by examining between-country differences or differences in the overall level of family violence across the 21 countries examined. Several general patterns emerge: First, the percentage of early adolescents experiencing family violence, whether operationalized as physical violence, psychological aggression, parental support for corporal punishment, or parental support for IPV, is quite high. For physical violence and psychological aggression, the numbers indicate that a remarkably high percentage of early adolescents experience some form of family violence during the ages of 10–14, rarely less than 30% for physical violence and never less

Table 10.1 Descriptive Statistics for each family violence indicator

Country	Data collection year	Abbreviation	Statistics	Physical violence	Psychological aggression	Support for corporal punishment	Parental support for IPV
Nigeria	2016–2017	NGA	Proportion	0.72	0.79	0.64	0.26
			SD	0.45	0.40	0.48	0.41
			Range	0–1	0–1	0–1	0–1
Côte d'Ivoire	2016	CIV	Observations	6519	6519	6434	6474
			Proportion	0.55	0.85	0.30	0.27
			SD	0.50	0.36	0.46	0.43
Benin	2014	BEN	Range	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
			Observations	2144	2144	2115	2144
			Proportion	0.71	0.92	0.47	0.30
Somalia (Somaliland)	2011	SOM	SD	0.46	0.30	0.50	0.41
			Range	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
			Observations	2890	2890	2858	2890
Kenya (Bungoma, Kakamega, Turkana)	2013–2014	KEN	Proportion	0.71	0.71	0.31	0.39
			SD	0.47	0.47	0.47	0.47
			Range	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Zimbabwe	2014	ZWE	Observations	1530	1530	1497	1530
			Proportion	0.59	0.51	0.64	0.37
			SD	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.47
Zimbabwe	2014	ZWE	Range	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
			Observations	839	839	817	832
			Proportion	0.26	0.54	0.39	0.21
Zimbabwe	2014	ZWE	SD	0.44	0.50	0.48	0.39
			Range	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
			Observations	3741	3741	3730	3710

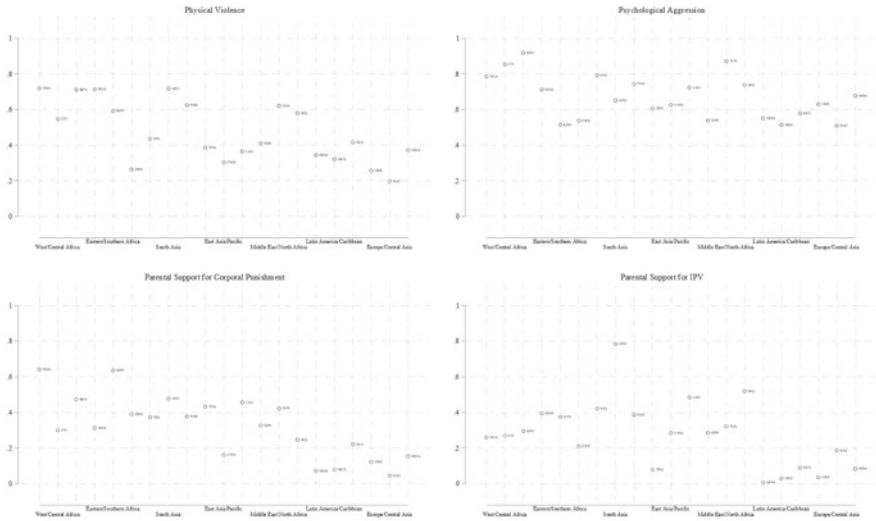
Nepal	2014	NPL	Proportion	0.44	0.79	0.37	0.42
			SD	0.49	0.41	0.49	0.49
			Range	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Afghanistan	2010–2011	AFG	Observations	2904	2904	2873	2853
			Proportion	0.72	0.65	0.48	0.78
			SD	0.46	0.48	0.50	0.44
Pakistan	2014	PAK	Range	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
			Observations	4064	4064	3644	4064
			Proportion	0.62	0.74	0.38	0.39
Thailand	2015–2016	THA	SD	0.49	0.45	0.48	0.48
			Range	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
			Observations	8488	8488	8373	8488
Vietnam	2013–2014	VNM	Proportion	0.39	0.61	0.43	0.08
			SD	0.49	0.49	0.50	0.26
			Range	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Vietnam	2013–2014	VNM	Observations	4432	4432	4367	4432
			Proportion	0.30	0.63	0.16	0.28
			SD	0.46	0.49	0.36	0.44
Vietnam	2013–2014	VNM	Range	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
			Observations	1771	1771	1754	1771
			Proportion	0.30	0.63	0.16	0.28

(continued)

Table 10.1 (continued)

Country	Data collection year	Abbreviation	Statistics	Physical violence	Psychological aggression	Support for corporal punishment	Parental support for IPV
Laos	2011–2012	LAO	Proportion	0.37	0.72	0.46	0.48
			SD	0.47	0.46	0.50	0.50
			Range	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Sudan	2014	SDN	Observations	5975	5975	5791	5975
			Proportion	0.41	0.54	0.33	0.28
			SD	0.49	0.50	0.46	0.44
Tunisia	2011–2012	TUN	Range	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
			Observations	3662	3662	3356	3662
			Proportion	0.62	0.87	0.42	0.32
Iraq	2011	IRQ	SD	0.49	0.35	0.49	0.46
			Range	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
			Observations	1679	1679	1658	1679
Dominican Republic	2014	DOM	Proportion	0.58	0.74	0.25	0.52
			SD	0.50	0.46	0.42	0.50
			Range	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Mexico	2015	MEX	Observations	9977	9977	9825	9977
			Proportion	0.34	0.55	0.07	0.01
			SD	0.47	0.50	0.24	0.11
			Range	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
			Observations	4734	4734	4624	4712
			Proportion	0.32	0.51	0.08	0.03
			SD	0.47	0.50	0.26	0.18
			Range	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
			Observations	1835	1835	1826	1835

Guyana	2014	GUY	Proportion	0.42	0.58	0.22	0.09
			SD	0.49	0.49	0.41	0.29
			Range	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
			Observations	833	833	794	821
Ukraine	2012	UKR	Proportion	0.26	0.63	0.12	0.04
			SD	0.45	0.49	0.30	0.20
			Range	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
			Observations	1025	1025	962	1025
Kazakhstan	2015	KAZ	Proportion	0.20	0.51	0.04	0.19
			SD	0.37	0.50	0.19	0.36
			Range	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
			Observations	2234	2234	2183	2234
Moldova	2012	MDA	Proportion	0.37	0.68	0.15	0.08
			SD	0.48	0.47	0.36	0.25
			Range	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
			Observations	1113	1113	1081	1113



Data come from UNICEF’s Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys

Fig. 10.1 Proportion of adolescents experiencing violence in 21 countries

than 40% for psychological aggression. Further, in some countries, such as Nigeria, Benin, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tunisia, more than 60% of early adolescents have experienced physical violence. Further, more than 80% of early adolescents in Côte d’Ivoire, Benin, and Tunisia report having experienced psychological aggression.

Second, there is a pronounced gradient across regions, with levels of family violence tending higher in sub-Saharan Africa than in Latin America and the Caribbean or Eastern Europe or Central Asia. This likely has to do with differences in the overall level of economic, educational, and public health development. Sub-Saharan Africa has some of the lowest levels in the world.

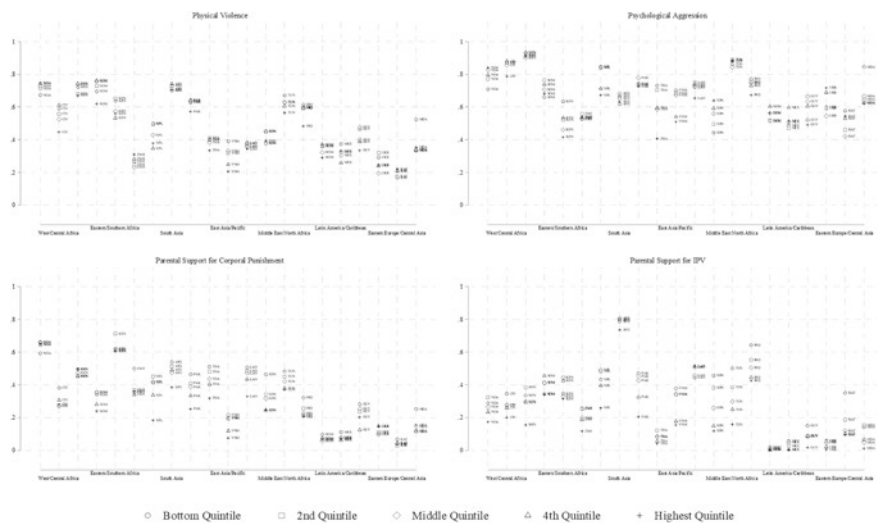
Third, we see considerable variation across indicators, with more early adolescents experiencing psychological aggression than physical violence, both of which are more common than parental support for corporal punishment or intimate partner violence. Of the four, early adolescents around the world are least likely to experience parental support for IPV, with the exception of Afghanistan, where parental support for IPV is normative and nearly universal at around 80%. Parental support for intimate partner violence is also quite high in Laos and Iraq, where it hovers around 50%. In contrast, very few caregivers report support for intimate partner violence in the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Ukraine, Moldova, or Thailand, countries where parental support for corporal punishment is also quite low.

While overall differences in family violence experienced by early adolescents are crucial, these between-country differences may mask significant variation within each individual country. For this reason, we next move to examine within-country differences in family violence experienced by early adolescents, with families

broken down by the wealth quintile, maternal education, residence (rural/urban), adolescent sex, adolescent age, and adolescent's household living arrangements (Figs. 10.2, 10.3, 10.4, 10.5, 10.6 and 10.7).

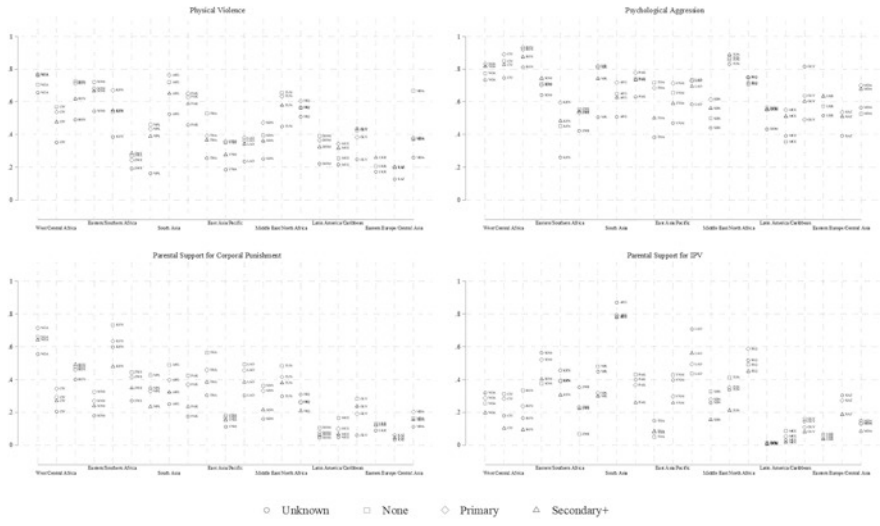
Family Violence by Wealth Quintile

Figure 10.2 displays the four family violence indicators—physical violence, psychological aggression, parental support for corporal punishment, and parental support for intimate partner violence—by wealth quintile, which is used to measure household wealth on a scale of 1–5, where 5 represents those in the wealthiest 20% of households in the country. In general, households in the top wealth quintile report lower levels of physical violence, psychological aggression, and parental support for corporal punishment and intimate partner violence. However, there are some exceptions, with individuals in other quintiles reporting similar or even lower levels of violence in some countries and with the lowest quintile reporting the lowest levels of physical violence in Nigeria. The pattern is generally consistent for psychological aggression, with some exceptions. For parental support for corporal punishment, there is variation in which wealth quintile reports the highest levels, with those in the bottom quintile expressing some of the highest support in a majority of countries. The wealthiest tend to express the least support for intimate partner violence, with few exceptions.



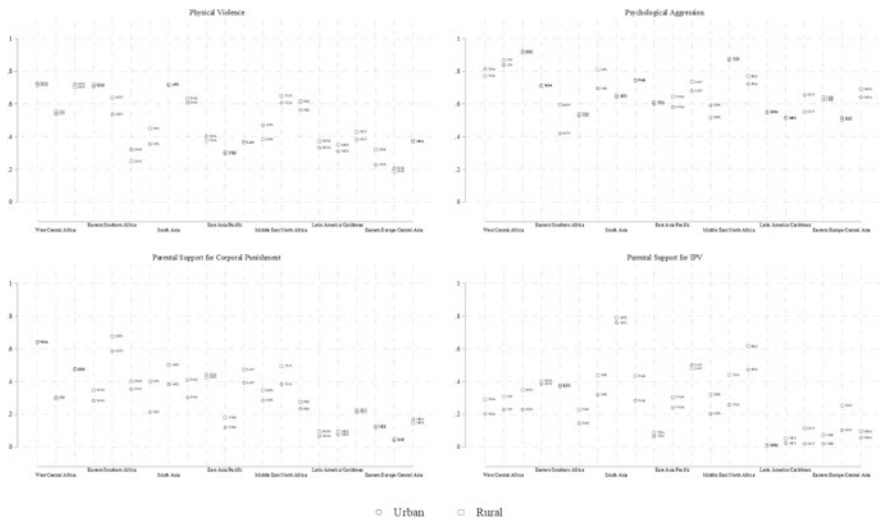
Data come from UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys

Fig. 10.2 Proportion of adolescents experiencing violence in 21 countries, by wealth quintile



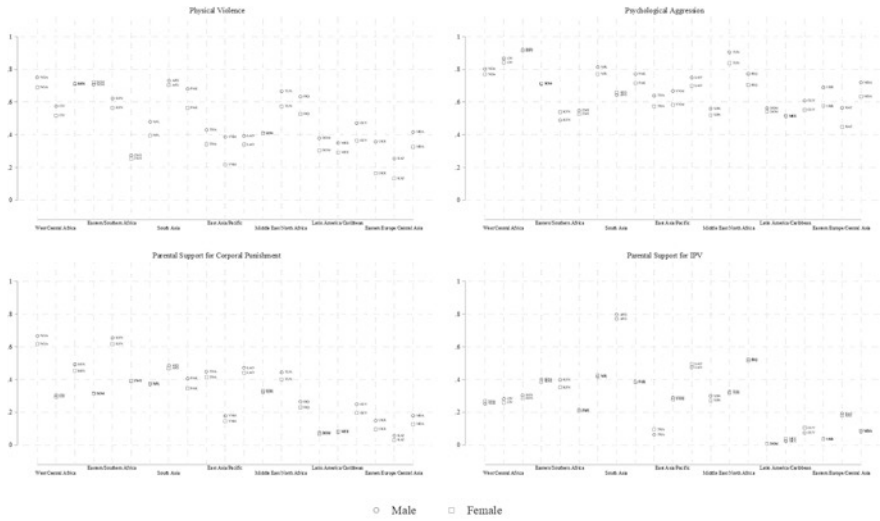
Data come from UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys

Fig. 10.3 Proportion of adolescents experiencing violence in 21 countries, by maternal education



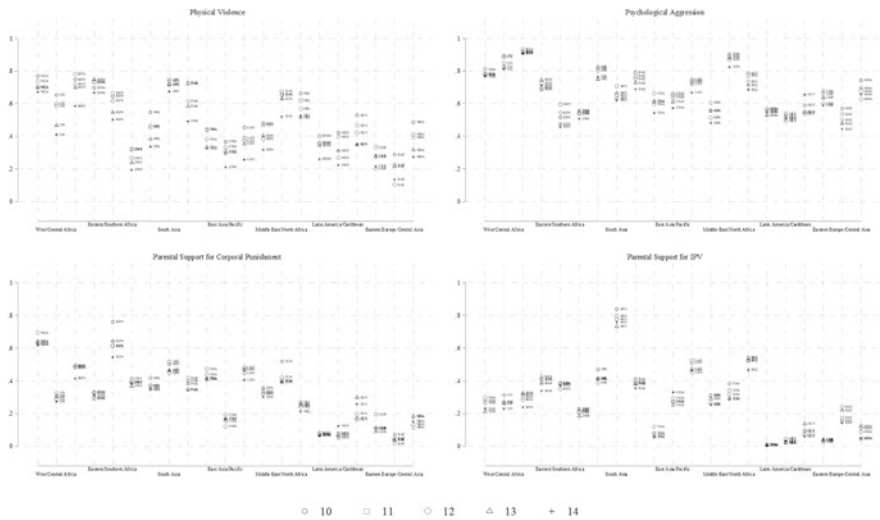
Data come from UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys

Fig. 10.4 Proportion of adolescents experiencing violence in 21 countries, by residence



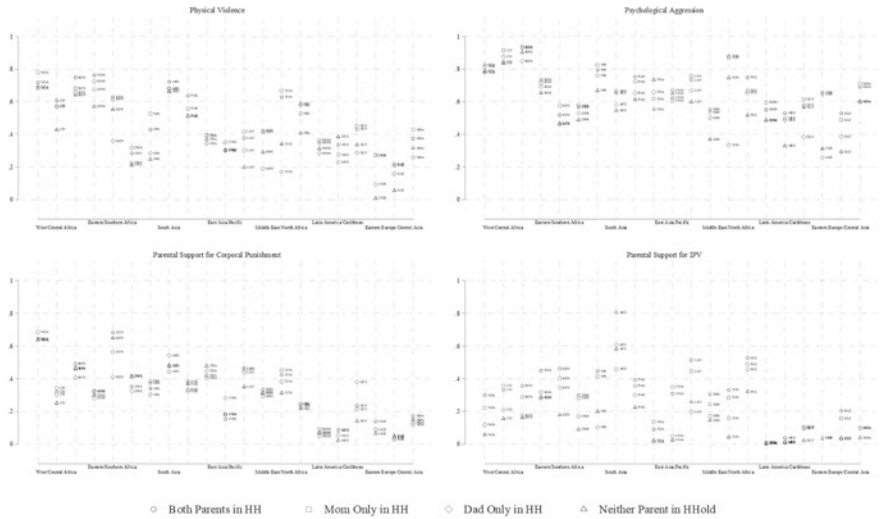
Data come from UNICEF’s Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys

Fig. 10.5 Proportion of adolescents experiencing violence in 21 countries, by sex



Data come from UNICEF’s Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys

Fig. 10.6 Proportion of adolescents experiencing violence in 21 countries, by age



Data come from UNICEF’s Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys

Fig. 10.7 Proportion of adolescents experiencing violence in 21 countries, by household living arrangements

Along with examining patterns of household wealth and family violence, we also investigated three additional questions: First, we distinguish which countries demonstrated statistically significant differences in each of the four family violence indicators between wealthiest and poorest quintiles. Second, we assessed which countries consistently showed those same disparities across all four family violence indicators. Finally, we sought to pinpoint any unexpected findings or countries that differed from the general pattern observed.

Regarding the first question on the countries in which we observed statistically significant differences between wealthiest and poorest quintiles for each of the four outcomes, our analysis revealed that, for physical violence, adolescents from the highest wealth quintile in eight countries (Cote d’Ivoire, Nepal, Pakistan, Vietnam, Tunisia, Iraq, Guyana, and Moldova) were less likely to experience violence than those from the lowest wealth quintile. Conversely, for psychological violence, adolescents from the wealthiest quintile in eight countries (Côte d’Ivoire, Kenya, Nepal, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Iraq, and Moldova) were more likely to experience violence than those from the lowest wealth quintile. For parental support of corporal punishment, 11 countries (Nigeria, Côte d’Ivoire, Kenya, Nepal, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Sudan, Iraq, Ukraine, and Moldova) showed a significant difference between wealthiest and poorest households, with parents in the poorest households expressing more support for physical punishment. Similarly, parental support for corporal punishment favored early adolescents from wealthy households in 12 countries (Côte d’Ivoire, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Nepal, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Sudan, Tunisia, and Iraq), and in 19 countries, parental support for

intimate partner violence was significantly lower in wealthy households, with the only exceptions being Somalia and Laos.

For the second question asking about which countries showed the most consistent disparities, our analysis showed that the difference between wealthiest and poorest households was always significant in four countries: Cote d'Ivoire, Nepal, Vietnam, and Iraq. This suggests that adolescents from wealthy households were consistently less likely to experience family violence than their counterparts from poorer households, regardless of the type of violence analyzed.

Additionally, our results suggest that the relationship between wealth and violence is not always straightforward. For example, in Nigeria, Sudan, and Ukraine, adolescents from the highest wealth quintile were more likely to experience physical violence and psychological control than those from the poorest households. Furthermore, in only one country (Laos) were parents from the wealthiest households more likely to express support for intimate partner violence compared to those from the poorest households.

Family Violence by Maternal Education

We next examined differences in family violence among early adolescents by maternal education (Fig. 10.3). We found that highly educated mothers reported the least physical violence in 14 out of 21 countries, the least parental support for corporal punishment and intimate partner violence (IPV) in 17 out of 21 countries, and the least psychological aggression in 8 out of 21 countries. In contrast, adolescents of highly educated mothers were at or near the top for family violence in other countries, such as Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Mexico, and Guyana for physical violence; Moldova for psychological aggression; Nigeria, Benin, and Vietnam for parental support for corporal punishment; and Somalia, Vietnam, and Laos for parental support for IPV, strongly suggesting that the link between maternal education and family violence, at least in early adolescence, varies by context and is not necessarily universal.

Further, we chose to retain the category of "Unknown" as an education category (not available in all countries) instead of treating it as missing. In some cases, adolescents whose mothers fell into this category reported the lowest levels of exposure to family violence (e.g., physical violence in Nigeria, Nepal, Iraq, and Guyana; psychological aggression in Nigeria, Kenya, and Nepal; and parental support for corporal punishment in Nigeria and Guyana), whereas in other contexts (psychological aggression in Guyana, parental support for corporal punishment in Iraq, and parental support for IPV in Kenya, Afghanistan, Thailand, Sudan, and Iraq) early adolescents whose mother's education level was unknown appeared to be at the highest risk of family violence.

We next examined family violence indicators and identified countries with significant differences between early adolescents whose mothers had at least a secondary education (which we term “well-educated” below for ease of use) compared to early adolescents whose mothers reported no formal education. We then assessed which countries showed consistent disparities across all four indicators (comparing those two educational groups) and pinpointed unexpected findings or divergences.

Results indicate a significant difference in reported violence and parental support for violence based on the education level of mothers. In six countries (Cote d’Ivoire, Benin, Nepal, Pakistan, Thailand, and Tunisia), early adolescents whose mothers had at least a secondary education were significantly less likely to experience physical violence than those whose mothers reported no formal education. We observed similar differences for psychological control in just two countries (Nepal and Thailand). Additionally, there were differences in parental support for physical punishment (ten countries: Kenya, Zimbabwe, Nepal, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Thailand, Laos, Sudan, Tunisia, and Iraq) and intimate partner violence (nine countries: Nigeria, Cote d’Ivoire, Benin, Nepal, Pakistan, Vietnam, Sudan, Tunisia, and Ukraine), with well-educated mothers being less likely to support violence than mothers with no formal education.

In terms of consistency, only in Nepal was the difference between early adolescents whose parents were well-educated and those whose parents had no formal education always significant across the four outcomes studied.

However, there were some unexpected findings as well. In Iraq and Mexico, early adolescents whose mothers were well-educated were more likely to experience psychological control than those whose mothers had no formal education. Similarly, in Zimbabwe and Laos, well-educated parents were more likely to support intimate partner violence, which goes against the expected view.

Family Violence by Residence

We next moved to examine differences by residential area, rural or urban. Overall, the results were mixed across country and outcome. Although our expectation of higher levels of family violence was generally borne out by the data (adolescents whose families lived in rural areas reported higher levels of all family violence indicators in the majority of the countries studied here), the results were not straightforward and not typically significant. In only three countries (Nepal, Iraq, and Ukraine) were the observed means significantly different between rural vs. urban early adolescents for physical violence, with rural residents reporting higher levels and 5 (Kenya, Nepal, Vietnam, Laos, and Iraq) for psychological control. We observed more significant differences when examining rural vs. urban differences in parental support for physical punishment and IPV, where we observed significant differences between reported parental support in 9 (Somalia, Nepal, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Vietnam, Laos, Sudan, Tunisia, and Iraq) countries for parental support for corporal

punishment and 15 (Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Benin, Zimbabwe, Nepal, Pakistan, Vietnam, Sudan, Tunisia, Iraq, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Guyana, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan) for parental support of IPV.

In terms of consistency, only in Nepal, Sudan, and Iraq was the difference between urban and rural early adolescents significant across the four outcomes studied. While most results were in the expected direction of higher violence among rural early adolescents, there were several exceptions to this pattern, including Zimbabwe and Sudan for physical violence, where urban youth appeared at greater risk. We observed the same phenomena again in Sudan, where urban Sudanese early adolescents reported higher levels of psychological control than their rural counterparts.

Family Violence by Sex

We next moved to examine differences in family violence by the biological sex of the early adolescent. The results were somewhat surprising in light of expectations that girls would be more likely to be victims of family violence, but this is not what we found. For both physical violence and psychological control, when the difference between male and female early adolescents was significant, as it was in 13 countries (Nigeria, Nepal, Pakistan, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Tunisia, Iraq, Dominican Republic, Guyana, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Moldova) for physical violence and 10 countries (Nepal, Pakistan, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Tunisia, Iraq, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Moldova) for psychological control, male adolescents were more likely to have been the victim of family violence. The results for parental support for corporal punishment and IPV tended to show few differences. Only in three countries (Nigeria, Pakistan, and Iraq) did we find evidence of sex differences in parental support for corporal punishment (in all three instances, males were more likely than females to have a parent who expressed support for such treatment), and only in Thailand did we find similar instances of sex differences in parental support for IPV, with Thai female early adolescents more likely than male early adolescents to have a parent expressing support for IPV.

Surprisingly, there were no countries for which we observed consistent significant differences between male and female early adolescents across all four family violence indicators, though the difference between boys and girls was significant across three of the four outcomes in Pakistan, Thailand, and Iraq. In terms of unexpected findings, we did not observe much variation from what we expected for physical violence, as male early adolescents were more likely to be the victim of physical violence. Interestingly, we observed the same thing for psychological control and parental support for corporal punishment, where male early adolescents were again at greater risk in those countries for whom the difference between male and female adolescents was significant.

Family Violence by Age

The next variable examined was early adolescents' age. We found significant differences between 10- and 14-year-olds for physical violence in all but two countries (Somalia and Ukraine). In all 19 countries in which we found a significant difference in the physical violence experienced by 10-year-old vs. 14-year-old adolescents, younger adolescents were at higher risk of physical violence than their older counterparts. We observed a similar pattern for psychological control but found significant differences between 10- and 14-year-olds only in nine countries (Cote d'Ivoire, Nepal, Pakistan, Vietnam, Laos, Sudan, Tunisia, Iraq, and Kazakhstan), all of which indicated, again, that younger adolescents were at greater risk of psychological control than their older counterparts. The same pattern repeated for parental support for corporal punishment and IPV, where four countries (Kenya, Pakistan, Tunisia, and Iraq) and six countries (Cote d'Ivoire, Benin, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tunisia, and Iraq), respectively, saw age differences in the likelihood of experiencing parental support for each type of family violence.

In terms of consistency, we observed age differences across all four family violence indicators in Pakistan, Tunisia, and Iraq. As for surprising or unexpected findings, we found it striking that in no country did we find evidence of older adolescents being more at risk of violence. The greatest risk for family violence was always among the younger adolescents, at least in countries where the difference between the two ages were statistically significant.

Family Violence by Household Living Arrangements

As a final step, we assessed how family violence indicators differed by household living arrangements and family structure. Results suggested that the link between household living arrangements and family violence is mixed, nuanced, and complex. In some countries, early adolescents living only with their mothers or only their fathers were most likely to report physical violence (Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Nepal, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Tunisia, Dominican Republic, Guyana, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Moldova), psychological control (Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Benin, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Nepal, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Laos, Dominican Republic, Guyana, Ukraine, and Moldova), parental support for corporal punishment (Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Nepal, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Tunisia, Iraq, Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Guyana), and parental support for IPV (Cote d'Ivoire, Thailand, Vietnam, Guyana, Ukraine, and Moldova).

In other instances, adolescents who lived with both parents appeared to be at the greatest risk of physical violence (Cote d'Ivoire, Benin, Somalia, Kenya, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Thailand, Sudan, Iraq, and Ukraine), psychological

control (Somalia, Pakistan, Sudan, Tunisia, Iraq, Mexico, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan), support for corporal punishment (Benin, Somalia, Kenya, Pakistan, Laos, Sudan, Iraq, Ukraine, and Moldova), and support for IPV (Nigeria, Benin, Somalia, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Nepal, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Laos, Sudan, Tunisia, Iraq, Mexico, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Moldova). The household living arrangement that appeared to be linked to the best outcomes for adolescents across all four family violence indicators was early adolescents who lived with neither parent, at least for physical violence and psychological control. Because most of these adolescents lived with members of their extended family, this should only be somewhat surprising. Indeed, we found this pattern in 11 (Cote d'Ivoire, Benin, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Nepal, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Laos, Iraq, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan) of 21 countries for physical violence, 12 (Cote d'Ivoire, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Nepal, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Laos, Sudan, Iraq, Mexico, Kazakhstan, and Moldova) of 21 for psychological control, 7 (Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Laos, Tunisia, Iraq, Mexico, and Guyana) for parental support for corporal punishment, and 14 (Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Benin, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Pakistan, Vietnam, Sudan, Tunisia, Iraq, Dominican Republic, Guyana, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan) of 21 for parental support for IPV. We opted not to present formal statistical tests for household living arrangements, but results are available from the first author.

Binary Logistic Regression

As a final step, we used binary logistic regression to examine the joint effects of all independent variables considered on the probability of experiencing each family violence indicator. Results can be found in Table 10.2 and the model includes country fixed effects. The coefficients are expressed in logits, a transformation of the odds ratio. A positive coefficient indicates a positive association with the outcome variable (denoted along the top line of the table), whereas a negative coefficient expresses a negative association. Numbers further from 0 indicate a greater strength of association with the outcome.

The results suggest that there are several predictor variables that are significantly associated with the outcomes. For example, adolescents whose mothers have no maternal education are more likely to experience physical violence, psychological aggression, and parental support for corporal punishment than those with unknown maternal education, as are those whose mothers have either a primary or secondary or more maternal education, with a secondary or more maternal education being associated with a lower likelihood of parental support for IPV. Rural residence was positively associated with support for IPV.

Female adolescents appear to be at lower risk of physical violence, psychological aggression, or parental support for corporal punishment. Early adolescents who

Table 10.2 Predicting adolescents experiencing family violence in 21 countries (binary logistic regression)

	Physical violence	Psychological aggression	Support for corporal punishment	Support for IPV
Wealth quintile	-0.00 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	-0.06** (0.02)	-0.15*** (0.02)
Unknown education	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)
No education	0.38** (0.12)	0.31* (0.13)	0.65*** (0.11)	-0.16 (0.11)
Primary education	0.56*** (0.13)	0.60*** (0.13)	0.62*** (0.12)	-0.05 (0.11)
Secondary+ education	0.39** (0.14)	0.33* (0.14)	0.28* (0.13)	-0.33** (0.12)
Urban residence	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)
Rural residence	0.01 (0.05)	-0.02 (0.06)	0.07 (0.05)	0.26*** (0.07)
Male adolescent	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)
Female adolescent	-0.37*** (0.04)	-0.22*** (0.04)	-0.19*** (0.04)	0.02 (0.04)
Adolescent age	-0.19*** (0.01)	-0.09*** (0.01)	-0.04** (0.01)	-0.05*** (0.01)
Both parents in HH	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)
Mom only in HH	-0.09 (0.06)	-0.02 (0.06)	-0.07 (0.06)	-0.19** (0.06)
Dad only in HH	-0.38*** (0.11)	-0.07 (0.10)	0.01 (0.10)	-0.83*** (0.12)
Neither parent in HHold	-0.27*** (0.07)	-0.09 (0.07)	0.02 (0.07)	-1.36*** (0.09)
Constant	3.11*** (0.20)	2.17*** (0.20)	0.92*** (0.21)	0.07 (0.20)

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Reference categories: maternal education (unknown), urban (rural), sex (male), household living arrangements (both parents live in household). All models include country fixed effects (not shown)

are older also report less violence for each indicator. Living with neither parent (in an extended family) is associated with a lower probability of both physical violence and parental support for IPV as is living with only one’s father, compared to living with both parents in the household. Early adolescents who live in wealthier households also appear to be at lower risk of parental support for either corporal punishment or IPV. The coefficients for other predictor variables are generally smaller in magnitude and less consistently associated with the outcomes.

Discussion

This paper examined patterns of family violence, operationalized as physical violence, psychological control, parental support for corporal punishment, and parental support for intimate partner violence (IPV), among over 70,000 early adolescents across 21 countries from 7 world regions (West/Central Africa, Eastern/Southern Africa, South Asia, East Asia/Pacific, Middle East/North Africa, Latin American/Caribbean, and Europe/Central Asia), grounded in three prominent theories of family violence (social theories, cumulative stress theories, and family systems theories) and founded on the reality of the enormous cost of family violence throughout the world that has led to the recognition of family violence as a public health issue.

The results provide important insights in the prevalence and variation of family violence. A high percentage of early adolescents experience some form of family violence, with more early adolescents reporting psychological control than physical violence, both of which occur more frequently than parental support for either corporal punishment or IPV. The results also revealed a marked gradient across world regions, with reported family violence higher in sub-Saharan Africa than in Latin America/Caribbean or Eastern Europe/Central Asia.

We also examined within-country differences in family violence experienced by early adolescents by breaking down each family violence indicator by wealth, maternal education, residence (rural/urban), adolescent sex and age, and household living arrangements. In terms of wealth, the results were complex and varied across countries and types of violence. In general, adolescents whose households were in the top wealth quintile tended to report lower levels of violence than those in poorer quintiles. However, there were exceptions, with less wealthy individuals in some countries reporting similar or even lower levels of violence. For instance, early adolescents from wealthy households in Nigeria, Sudan, and Ukraine were more likely to experience some forms of violence.

For maternal education, the pattern of complexity and context-dependency continued. Early adolescents of highly educated mothers typically reported the lowest levels of family violence, but this was not always the case. In some countries, adolescents of highly educated mothers were at or near the top for family violence, which we observed in countries as different as Iraq, Mexico, Zimbabwe, and Laos.

In terms of rural vs. urban differences, the results typically showed higher levels of family violence in rural areas, but this was, again, not consistent across all countries or outcomes. In only three countries (Nepal, Iraq, and Ukraine) were rural residents significantly more likely to report physical violence and in six countries for psychological control. However, differences were observed in 9 and 15 countries when assessing parental support for corporal punishment and IPV, respectively. Interestingly, urban adolescents in Zimbabwe and Sudan were at a greater risk for physical violence than those living in rural areas of their respective countries.

For biological sex, the results were somewhat surprising, as prior research (World Health Organization, 2020) suggests that, with the exception of physical violence, females are more likely than males to experience family violence. Instead, male

early adolescents were more likely to have been the victim of family violence, both physical and psychological controls, when there were significant differences. Few sex differences were found for parental support for corporal punishment and IPV, respectively.

Results for child age indicated that younger adolescents (aged 10) were often at higher risk of family violence across all four violence indicators than their older, 14-year-old counterparts. Surprisingly, in no country did we find evidence where older adolescents experienced a statistically higher risk of violence, suggesting that the risk burden for family violence falls on younger early adolescents.

The findings suggest a nuanced relationship between household living arrangements and family violence. In some countries, early adolescents living with a single parent were at greater risk of physical violence, psychological control, and parental support for either corporal punishment or IPV. In others, adolescents living with both parents (but not extended family members) were at greater risk. The best outcomes were observed for early adolescents who typically lived with neither parent but members of their extended family, a topic that merits further research.

Consistent with the theoretical perspectives on family violence (social theories, cumulative stress theories, and family systems theories), we can validate that family violence among early adolescents is more often than not, more likely to occur where social and familial underpinnings make it more likely. Family violence (per social theories) often appears more likely to happen when families face economic hardship and social disadvantage due to high levels of acute or chronic stress (per cumulative stress theories), so rural families or families with limited resources may face additional stressors linked to social isolation and lack of access to services. Family dynamics and power imbalances within the family (per family systems theories) may also lead to violence, such as when adolescents whose mothers have greater levels of education or whose families have greater wealth report fewer experiences with family violence, likely due, in part, to more egalitarian family dynamics and better communication, thereby reducing the chances of family violence. As all three theories suggest, adolescent age and sex may also matter because younger adolescents are often more vulnerable to abuse due to their dependence on caregivers and girls due to gender discrimination. Further, all three theories suggest that single-parent households may face greater stress, leading to a higher risk of violence, whereas adolescents in extended family households may benefit from the stability and extra caregivers such households often provide.

Taken together, the findings underscore why policymakers, academics, governmental and nongovernmental organizations, and civic society should seek to address family violence in early adolescence, whose costs are high and pervade throughout the life course, whether measured in terms of emotional/physical scars, mental health problems, decreased social cohesion, or higher rates of crime and substance abuse. The burden is also economic with increased healthcare costs, lost productivity, and attenuated economic growth. The costs of not dealing with the problem, in short, are simply too high to ignore. Evidence-based prevention and intervention programs, tailored toward idiosyncratic cultural, societal, and political factors, can create a more equitable and safer society for all, regardless of age, gender, family

structure, or socioeconomic status. A final but key piece to the puzzle, however, often remains underappreciated when considering policies, practices, and programs, namely, the importance of developing “safe, stable, nurturing relationships (Smith et al., 2017, p. 5)” among family members.

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Chapter 11

Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Among Qatari Parents During the Pandemic



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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an international crisis at various levels: psychologically, emotionally, and economically (WHO, 2020). Globally, several studies have documented the effect of the pandemic on people's mental health, particularly the impact of social isolation and quarantine on individuals' anxiety and stress levels (e.g., Arafa et al., 2020; Melo & Soares, 2020; Williams et al., 2020). Concepts such as social space and social distancing have been used more and more to refer to the act of avoiding crowded places by creating distance between people when in public to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 (Jacobson et al., 2020). The implementation of social distancing and social space is accompanied by the closings of in-person educational institutions (WHO, 2020).

Many countries in the Gulf region, including Qatar, have enforced lockdown measures between March and June 2020, during which time residents were not allowed to exit their homes unless they were authorized workers (e.g., medical workers) (Alshammari et al., 2020; MOH, 2020). In addition, there were also regulations put in place for familial gatherings, schools and universities, traveling, malls, businesses, restaurants, shops, sports facilities, gyms, public swimming pools, parks, and attending mosques (Public Health Authority, 2020). The lockdown measure also caused students to focus on their education through virtual learning programs rather than traditional, in-person learning methods (WHO, 2020). Violations of these regulations resulted in penalties and, in some cases, arrests (Algaissi et al., 2020). Implementing these prevention methods in Qatar was designed to prevent

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virus transmission and contain the outbreak as effectively as possible. However, while being relatively effective at controlling the spread of the virus, these restrictions impacted access to services such as childcare and education, likely leading to increased stress levels for parents (Verrocchio, 2020).

The COVID-19 safety measures have impacted many individuals' quality of life worldwide. The general quality of life can be affected by various factors, including physical health, psychological states, personal beliefs, social relationships, and engagement with the environment (Melo-Oliveira et al., 2021). Precautions such as lockdown, quarantine, and social isolation have exacerbated the impacts of the pandemic's consequences. Empirically, among populations where COVID-19 has been present, such as Qatar, people reported increased anxiety, depression, helplessness, insomnia, and general well-being reduction (Melo-Oliveira et al., 2021).

Studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic suggest that reductions in physical and social interactions led to significant psychological distress (e.g., Jacobson et al., 2020; Rajkumar, 2020; Remuzzi & Remuzzi, 2020). For example, rates of depression and anxiety increased considerably, according to a large-scale Chinese survey (Qiu et al., 2020). Similarly, results from a British qualitative study with 27 participants assessed the impact of social distancing on mental health and reported negative impacts on mental health and general well-being; for instance, participants experienced a decreased sense of meaning and self-worth (Williams et al., 2020).

In addition to social distancing, other consequences of the pandemic have caused increased mental distress among citizens. Intense mass media coverage regarding COVID-19 was directly related to anxiety and stress for Qatari citizens, with 55.8% of individuals stating that media coverage surrounding the virus increased their mental health suffering (Zakout et al., 2020). This showcases the broad impacts of the pandemic on communities' mental health beyond the immediate concerns regarding infection with the virus or the consequences of social isolation (Rajkumar, 2020).

To date, many studies worldwide have explored the psychological impact of the pandemic on people from different populations, and nearly half of these studies have found a high level of isolation, stress, anxiety, negative emotions, overworking, and frustration related to the pandemic (e.g., Kang et al., 2020; Shigemura et al., 2020). A broad range of fears and stressors are based on the pandemic that increases mental health hardship, such as the fear of becoming infected, financial hardship, diminished food supplies, and limited recreational activity (Khan et al., 2020). Additionally, women, youth, individuals not in romantic relationships, and those isolated at home for extended periods all report higher rates of mental distress due to the pandemic (Tee et al., 2020). Specific vulnerable populations are at a higher risk for developing mental health problems because of the pandemic. Many psychological interventions that would effectively address these negative symptoms are more challenging to carry out during the pandemic, and many have not yet been implemented in non-Western countries (Rajkumar, 2020).

Emerging research has also explored the psychological impact of the pandemic, specifically on families and parents. The findings highlight a significant increase in stress levels during the pandemic, high depressive symptoms, and more significant anxiety (e.g., Brown et al., 2020). Some of these studies have evaluated the relationship between parents' well-being and their children's health (Spinelli et al., 2020), making clear the associations between parents' mental health and children's cognitive and emotional development (Verrocchio, 2020). The pandemic resulted in a prolonged lockdown, where parents endured immense amounts of stress and a lack of social support (Verrocchio, 2020). More specifically, certain structural aspects of the home and family environment, parents' subjective experiences of stress, and adjustment to quarantine have affected the well-being of parents (Spinelli et al., 2020).

Parents' perceptions of the pandemic situation and the difficulties imposed by quarantine are associated with parents' stress levels and children's psychological symptoms regarding how they exhibit behaviors and emotions (Spinelli et al., 2020). The restraints associated with quarantine have had impacts on both an individual and a dyadic level, creating a cycle of increased stress for parents, which can lead to an inability to productively parent their children, which in turn can create emotional and behavioral problems in the children, increasing parental stress even further (Spinelli et al., 2020).

Despite accumulating evidence on the impact of the pandemic on mental health, the preponderance of published studies reporting adverse post-lockdown mental health impacts on parents has come from economically developed countries or industrialized nations (e.g., Calvano et al., 2021; Khubchandani et al., 2021). Studies documenting mental health impacts in Qatar are comparatively fewer in number. To our knowledge, this is the first study documenting the course of mental health problems among Qatari parents during the pandemic lockdown in Qatar. The rationale for conducting the study during the initial lockdown was to understand the mental health impact of the pandemic and its restrictive measures on subjective experiences.

The research questions in this study are guided by a social determinant theoretical framework that focuses on how people's living circumstances shape their mental health and risk for mental illness (Alegra et al., 2018) during the lockdown during the pandemic in Qatar. This framework postulates that under-resourced populations are disproportionately affected by poor mental health and psychological disorders and that cumulative stress and physical health are critical mechanisms by which the negative effects of social determinants intensify over time (Allen et al., 2014). Social determinants of mental health encompass a broad range of variables, including societal influences such as economic opportunity, individual characteristics such as age and gender, and malleable variables such as educational attainment, financial strain, living conditions, and health behaviors (Braveman et al., 2011). The model of social determinants of mental health is particularly useful for comprehending mental health responses in disaster settings. Existing research demonstrates that individuals with economic and social vulnerabilities (e.g., low socioeconomic

status, insecure employment, insufficient social support) fare worse during and after disasters, whereas those with protective social determinants demonstrate resilience (Mao & Agyapong, 2021). In addition, this study is guided by a life course theoretical framework (Bengtson & Allen, 1993) and an intergenerational solidarity model (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997) that focus on social support exchanges between members of multigenerational families during the COVID-19 pandemic. Social support exchanges during the pandemic are likely to affect parental health and well-being (Thomas & Kim, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic may also lead to strengthened ties between multigenerational family members (Ayalon et al., 2020; Gilligan et al., 2020; Morrow-Howell et al., 2020; Thomas & Kim, 2020).

The overarching goal of this study was to examine mental health among Qatari families using social determinants of mental health and life course lenses. Our primary objective was to identify proximal, or “downstream,” social determinants of psychological well-being among family members during initial lockdown during the pandemic (Braveman et al., 2011). Consistent with this model and prior research, we defined “downstream” factors as both individual characteristics (e.g., parent educational attainment, parent marital status, and parent gender) and home environment characteristics (e.g., family structure) (Blaikie et al., 2004; Cutter et al., 2003; Morrow, 1999). According to research, the mental health conditions most susceptible to negative social determinants are anxiety, mood, trauma, and stress-related disorders (Whiteford et al., 2016). Thus, we examined parents’ depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms in the current study. In general, we hypothesized that social and economic risk indices would be associated with poorer mental health outcomes, whereas protective social determinants would be associated with improved mental health outcomes during initial lockdowns. For instance, we anticipated that parents’ unemployment would be associated with higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, whereas increased parent education attainment would be associated with lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. Given the evidence of gender-specific vulnerability to stress (Boettcher et al., 2021; Mao & Agyapong, 2021) and recent research indicating that mothers have been disproportionately impacted by pandemic-related challenges (Davenport et al., 2020; Martucci, 2021), we hypothesized that mothers would fare worse than fathers in terms of depression, anxiety, and stress. Additionally, consistent with the social determinant model’s assertion that the cumulative effects of social risks increase with age, we hypothesized that older parents would have stronger associations between social determinants and anxiety than younger parents. In addition, consistent with the intergenerational solidarity model’s concepts of functional solidarity and normative solidarity (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997) that social support between members of multigenerational families increases during the COVID-19 pandemic (Gilligan et al., 2020), we hypothesized that multigenerational families living together under one roof would be associated with lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress after the lockdown.

Methods

Procedures and Sample

In April/June 2020, an invitation to participate in the study was made through a self-administered survey in Qatar. The survey was distributed via different channels such as social media (e.g., Twitter, Instagram), mobile phones, and emails using a database of Family Consulting Center (WIFAQ). Participants completed the questionnaires through an online survey platform (SurveyMonkey). Data ($n = 2318$) were collected for approximately 4–5 weeks. The questionnaire, which was originally developed in English, was translated by the research team into Arabic. A pretest among Qatari citizens was used to determine the practicability, validity, and interpretability of the responses to the respective questions. The tool was slightly modified based on the pretest results to make it more context-specific.

Ethics Approval

The study was approved by the relevant Institutional Review Board (protocol: QBRI-IRB 2020-06-021), which allowed parents or caregivers of a child aged from birth to 18 years to participate in this study and provide their consent because the online survey did not pose any more than minimal risk to research participants. Confidentiality was maintained via anonymity because no personally identifiable information was collected.

Measures

Psychological Distress

Parental psychological distress was measured by the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21) (Norton, 2007). We used the validated Arabic version of DASS-21 (Ali et al., 2017; Moussa et al., 2016). The depression scale assesses dysphoria, hopelessness, devaluation of life, self-deprecation, lack of interest/involvement, anhedonia, and inertia (Ahmed & Julius, 2015). The anxiety scale assesses autonomic arousal, skeletal muscle effects, situational anxiety, and subjective experiences of anxious affect (Ahmed & Julius, 2015). The stress scale assesses difficulty relaxing, nervous arousal, agitation, irritability/overreactivity, and impatience (Kannur & Itaqi, 2018; Norton, 2007).

Like Norton (2007), we employed the full 21-item scale instead of breaking the scale into its constituent parts. Example items included “I found it hard to wind down,” “I felt depressed and had no motivation,” and “I felt I had no desire for

anything.” Items were summed to create a sum score. Like Ahmed and Julius (2015), scores for depression, anxiety, and stress are calculated by summing the scores for the relevant items per scale; then, the DASS-21 subscale total is multiplied by 2 to give the final score for categorization into normal, mild, moderate, severe, or extremely severe. Clinical cutoffs for depression are normal (0–9), mild (10–13), moderate (14–20), severe (21–27), and extremely severe (≥ 28). Clinical cutoffs for anxiety are normal (0–7), mild (8–9), moderate (10–14), severe (15–19), and extremely severe (≥ 20). Clinical cutoffs for stress are normal (0–14), mild (15–18), moderate (19–25), severe (26–33), and extremely severe (≥ 34).

In this study, dichotomous cutoffs were used to reflect symptoms as severe or extremely severe so that variables of interest could be examined for participants who were most likely to be suffering clinically elevated acute distress concomitant with the COVID-19 outbreak. Participant scores were coded as 0 (symptom levels of normal through moderate) and 1 (symptom levels of severe and extremely severe).

The DASS-21 has been validated in clinical samples (Antony et al., 1998; Clara et al., 2001; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995; Sinclair et al., 2012). The total scale of the Arabic version of DASS-21 for this sample had Cronbach’s alpha values of 0.96, 0.91, and 0.93 for the depression, anxiety, and stress subscales, respectively. These findings are comparable with previous research on the original English version of the DASS-21. Specifically, coefficient alphas of 0.94, 0.87, and 0.91 were found for the subscales of depression, anxiety, and stress, respectively (Antony et al., 1998).

COVID-19-Related Stressors

Parents were asked to report the presence of anyone in their immediate network (self, wife/husband, children, another member of the household) with COVID-19 medical vulnerability indicated by a lifetime history of related conditions (e.g., asthma, chronic lung disease, a heart condition, diabetes, cancer). We used a medical history checklist to assess the presence of COVID-19 medical vulnerability, including parental health status (0, *no health conditions*; 1, *COVID-19*; 2, *high blood pressure*; 3, *diabetes*; 4, *heart disease*; 5, *lung disease* (e.g., asthma); 6, *cancer*; 7, *clinically diagnosed depression/anxiety*; 8, *clinically diagnosed chronic physical health condition*; 10, *other clinically diagnosed chronic mental health condition*; 11, *autism*; and 12, *pregnancy*).

We examined a battery of independent variables in our models that constituted explanations for whom the pandemic might affect to a greater or lesser degree. This included the respondent’s biological sex, respondent’s age ($M_{\text{age}} = 33.54$ years, $SD = 0.41$), level of educational attainment, marital status, employment status, family size as the number of adults in the child’s household, and parental status as the number of children in the household. This data was coded for use in the regression analysis as explained below.

In addition to the above variables, we created bespoke weights to ensure that sample totals in each country matched the weighted population totals from the most recent demographic survey (DS) for Qatar in terms of age, sex, marital status, and

educational attainment. We did this to minimize bias from the convenience sampling approach and should not be viewed as comparable to a survey sampling weighting approach, which is not possible with non-probability samples except under exceptional circumstances that do not apply here. To do this, we ensured these variables were coded similarly in both our sample and the country-specific DS and then calculated the weighted percentage of each age by sex, by marital status, and by educational attainment combination in the DS data. We then ensured the bespoke sampling weights for our sample adjusted the same age by sex, by marital status, and by educational attainment combinations in our data to match those of the DS data.

Data Analysis

We analyzed data with SPSS Version 26.0. Descriptive statistics were used to document the prevalence of parental psychological distress in the sample. Logistic regression analyses were conducted with depression, anxiety, and stress as the outcomes and sociodemographic characteristics as the predictor variables to compute the odds ratios for these outcomes. For example, to identify whether health status was a potential risk factor for parental depression, anxiety, or stress, we compared the rate of depression, anxiety, or stress among participants with at least one medical vulnerability to COVID-19 to that of participants without. Statistical significance was established at an alpha of $p < 0.05$.

We entered (1) cutoff scores on the DASS-21 Depression, DASS-21 Anxiety, and DASS-21 Stress, where 0 equals subclinical [moderate score or below] and 1 equals clinically elevated [severe score or above] and (2) health status, where presence of at least one medical vulnerability to COVID-19 (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*). We also entered seven additional categorical variables as predictors:

- (1) Sex (0 = *male*, 1 = *female*).
- (2) Respondent's age (0 < 29, 1 = *range 30–44*; 2 = *range 45–64*; and 3 > 65).
- (3) Level of educational attainment (0 = *no qualifications*; 1 = *primary school or equivalent*; 2 = *secondary school or equivalent*; and 3 = *university degree*).
- (4) Marital status (0 = *divorced*; 1 = *married*; 2 = *widowed*; and 3 = *single*).
- (5) Employment status (0 = *not employed, not in labor force*, and 1 = *employed, in labor force*).
- (6) Multigenerational families living together under one roof (0 = 2 *adult*; 1 = 3–4 *adults*; 2 = +5 *adults*).
- (7) Parental status (0 = 1 *child*; 1 = 2–3 *children*; and 3 = 4 or more *children*).

We computed Pearson's correlations for continuously measured variables prior to dichotomization to test bivariate correlations between COVID-19-related stressors and severity of psychological distress.

Results

Table 11.1 displays descriptive statistics for all variables included in the analysis. The sample skewed slightly female at 56% ($n = 1893$), with a mean age of 33.54 years ($SD = 0.41$). Most had educational qualifications (78% were secondary school and above), 40% were married, and 70% were employed. Most respondents lived in an extended family household of more than three adults (74%) and had more than two children (73%). Over one-third of respondents ($n = 1217$) reported being in good health.

Post-Lockdown Parental Psychological Distress

Table 11.2 displays the prevalence and severity of respondents' depression, anxiety, and stress. Over half (50.63%) of participants had severe and extremely severe psychological distress during the initial lockdown. The prevalence of clinically elevated depression was 47.8%, with 13.2% of the participants reporting severe depression ($n = 447$) and 34.6% reporting extremely severe depression ($n = 1172$). Among parents reporting depression symptoms, severity ratings were as follows: normal ($n = 227$, 6.7%), mild ($n = 149$, 4.4%), and moderate ($n = 1392$, 41.1%). Mean scores on the DASS-21 Depression subscale were 19.69 ($SD = 3.20$), indicating moderate depression.

The prevalence of elevated general anxiety was 88.3%, with 79.4% of the participants reporting severe anxiety ($n = 2690$) and 8.9% reporting extremely severe anxiety ($n = 302$). Among parents reporting subclinical general anxiety, severity ratings were as follows: normal ($n = 27$, 0.8%), mild ($n = 95$, 2.8%), and moderate ($n = 274$, 8.1%). The mean score on the DASS-21 Anxiety subscale was 16.47 ($SD = 2.44$), indicating severe anxiety. Finally, the prevalence of clinically elevated general stress indicated that 15.8% of the participants reported severe stress ($n = 535$) and 70.7% of the participants reported moderate stress ($n = 2395$); none of the participants reported extreme stress. Among participants reporting subclinical stress, severity ratings were as follows: normal ($n = 224$, 6.6%) and mild ($n = 234$, 6.9%). The mean score on the DASS-21 Stress subscale was 22.02 ($SD = 4.01$), indicating moderate stress.

Logistic Regression

Table 11.3 displays the results from a series of logistic regressions. Results indicate that, compared to male participants, Qatari women had 2.58 times the odds of having clinically elevated depression, 95% CI [0.25, 1.04]; 3.75 times the odds of having clinically elevated anxiety, CI [0.52, 2.22]; and 2.11 times the odds of having

Table 11.1 Descriptive statistics for all variables included in the analysis (N = 2318)

Variable	Percentage	Mean	S.D
<i>Parents' age</i>		33.54	0.41
< 29	22		
30–44	49		
45–64	16		
+ 65	12		
<i>Gender</i>			
Female	56		
Male	44		
<i>Education level</i>			
No qualifications	22		
Primary	17		
Secondary	23		
University	38		
<i>Marital status</i>			
Divorced	23		
Married	40		
Widowed	17		
Single, never married	20		
<i>Employment status</i>			
Not employed, not in labor force	30		
Self-employed	21		
Employed, in labor force	49		
<i># children in household</i>		1.42	0.51
1	27		
2–3	48		
4+	25		
<i>Family size</i>		1.89	0.34
2 people	26		
3–4 people	41		
5–6 people	41		
6+	12		
<i>Health status</i>			
No health conditions	36		
COVID-19	11		
High blood pressure	12		
Diabetes	13		
Heart disease	8		
Lung disease	7		
Cancer	2		
Clinically diagnosed depression/anxiety	5		
Clinically diagnosed chronic physical health condition	2		
Autism	1		
Pregnancy	3		

Table 11.2 Descriptive statistics for the prevalence and severity of respondents' depression, anxiety, and stress (N = 2318)

Psychological distress	Percentage (%)	Mean	SE (mean)	SD
Depression		19.69	0.16	3.20
Extremely severe	34.6			
Severe	13.2			
Moderate	41.1			
Mild	4.4			
Normal	6.7			
Anxiety		16.47	0.12	2.44
Extremely severe	8.9			
Severe	79.4			
Moderate	8.1			
Mild	2.8			
Normal	0.8			
Stress		22.02	0.20	4.01
Severe	15.8			
Moderate	70.7			
Mild	6.9			
Normal	6.6			

clinically elevated stress, CI [0.37, 3.03]. Participants who are divorced or widowed had 3.94 times and 3.48 times the odds of having clinically elevated depression, 95% CI [0.49, 1.18] and [0.15, 1.50], respectively; 2.90 times and 2.98 times the odds of having clinically elevated anxiety, CI [0.11, 4.83] and [0.40, 2.73], respectively; and 2.71 times and 2.34 times the odds of having clinically elevated stress, CI [0.18, 2.69] and [0.51, 2.59], respectively.

Unemployed participants had 2.76 times the odds of having clinically elevated depression, 95% CI [1.20, 5.54]; 1.50 times the odds of having clinically elevated anxiety, CI [0.78, 2.89]; and 3.47 times the odds of having clinically elevated stress, CI [0.24, 1.68]. Participants who are parents or caregivers of four to six children had 1.32 times the odds of having clinically elevated depression, 95% CI [0.12, 1.21]; 1.41 times the odds of having clinically elevated anxiety, CI [0.73, 2.21]; and 1.40 times the odds of having clinically elevated stress, CI [1.34, 2.62]. Participants whom themselves or someone in their household had existing medical vulnerabilities related to COVID-19 had 2.96 times the odds of having clinically elevated depression, 95% CI [0.23, 2.74]; 3.62 times the odds of having clinically elevated anxiety, CI [1.86, 7.05]; and 3.56 times the odds of having clinically elevated stress, CI [1.47, 2.68]. Nuclear families had 1.01 times the odds of having clinically elevated depression, 95% CI [1.28, 2.55]; 1.22 times the odds of having clinically elevated anxiety, CI [0.62, 2.04]; and 0.61 times the odds of having clinically elevated stress, CI [0.23, 1.57].

Finally, factors such as parent education attainment and age were not significant predictors of odds for having post-lockdown psychological distress. Specifically,

Table 11.3 Logistic regression analysis for variables predicting parental psychosocial distress (N = 2318)

Predictors	Depression			Anxiety			Stress		
	OR	95% CI	p-value	OR	95% CI	p-value	OR	95% CI	p-value
Gender									
Female	2.58	0.25–1.04	<0.001 ^a	3.75	0.52–2.22	<0.001 ^a	2.11	0.37–3.03	<0.001 ^a
Male									
Parents' age (years)									
< 29	1.07	0.59–1.70	0.979	0.82	0.54–1.26	0.384	0.933	0.52–1.65	0.933
30–44	1.77	0.10–1.53	0.602	1.03	0.72–1.91	0.08	0.901	0.31–1.40	0.911
45–64	0.86	0.43–1.77	0.521	1.65	0.69–1.02	0.985	1.04	0.83–1.47	0.924
+ 65									
Education level									
No qualifications	2.62	0.10–4.85	0.602	1.69	0.04–6.31	0.784	1.23	0.82–4.11	0.831
Primary	1.24	0.04–3.42	0.891	1.92	0.04–9.03	0.738	1.24	1.61–7.52	0.756
Secondary	2.02	0.10–4.21	0.590	0.60	0.01–2.25	0.604	1.61	1.10–5.87	0.603
University									
Marital status									
Divorced	3.94	0.049–1.18	<0.001 ^a	2.90	0.11–4.83	<0.001 ^a	2.71	0.18–2.69	<0.001 ^a
Married	0.87	0.177–4.39	0.871	1.08	0.24–4.86	0.912	1.09	0.23–2.44	0.608
Widowed	3.48	0.156–1.50	<0.001 ^a	2.98	0.40–2.73	<0.001 ^a	2.34	0.51–2.59	<0.001 ^a
Single, never married									
Employment status									
Not employed, not in labor force	2.76	1.20–5.54	<0.001 ^a	1.50	0.78–2.89	<0.001 ^a	3.47	0.24–1.68	<0.001 ^a
Employed, in labor force									
# children in household									
1 child	0.62	0.14–1.34	0.401	1.58	0.56–4.48	0.385	1.01	0.65–1.29	0.311
2–3 children	0.49	0.17–1.92	0.534	0.58	0.16–2.02	0.397	1.28	1.03–2.45	0.364

(continued)

Table 11.3 (continued)

	Depression			Anxiety			Stress		
	OR	95% CI	p-value	OR	95% CI	p-value	OR	95% CI	p-value
Predictors									
4-6 children	1.32	0.12-1.21	<0.001 ^a	1.41	0.73-2.21	<0.001 ^a	1.40	1.34-2.62	<0.001 ^a
6 +									
# adults in household									
2 adults	1.01	1.28-2.55	<0.001 ^a	1.22	0.62-2.04	<0.001 ^a	0.61	0.23-1.57	<0.001 ^a
3-4 adults	1.31	1.91-2.42	0.09	2.18	0.74-2.35	0.153	0.93	0.19-4.74	0.934
5+ adults									
Health status: Medical vulnerability									
Yes	2.96	0.23-2.74	<0.001 ^a	3.62	1.86-7.05	<0.001 ^a	3.56	1.47-2.68	<0.001 ^a
No									
Constant (β)	-0.50			-2.61			-6.41		
SE	1.68			2.04			4.70		
Wald	0.09			1.63			1.44		
χ^2	8.41			9.97			5.80		
Df	8			8			8		
Nagelkerke's R^2	0.151			0.578			0.323		

^aSignificant at Bonferroni-corrected α (0.002)

participants with any education level did not have statistically greater psychological distress odds than participants without qualifications. Participants aged 18 to 64 years did not have statistically greater odds of psychological distress than older participants (+65 years old).

Correlation Results

Finally, Table 11.4 displays the results of Pearson's correlation analysis. We observed significant positive correlations between the severity of general depression and medical vulnerabilities ($r = 0.47, p < 0.01$) but negatively correlated with gender ($r = -0.14, p < 0.01$) and employment status ($r = -0.28, p < 0.01$). The severity of general anxiety was positively correlated with medical vulnerabilities ($r = -0.37, p < 0.01$) but negatively correlated with gender ($r = -0.11, p < 0.01$) and employment status ($r = -0.35, p < 0.01$). Finally, the severity of general stress was positively correlated with medical vulnerabilities ($r = 0.36, p < 0.01$) but negatively correlated with gender ($r = -.15, p < 0.01$) and employment status ($r = -0.34, p < 0.01$).

Discussion

Over 2 years after the first documented cases of COVID-19, this novel virus continues to be a global public health emergency, posing unprecedented economic, social, physical, and mental health challenges. The current study contributes to the scant literature on this critical topic in the Middle East/North African (MENA) countries in particular. The region which encompasses a diverse range of countries strategically positioned at the crossroads of Asia, Africa, and Europe. Illustrative examples of nations within this region include Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Morocco. Amid their distinctive cultural, historical, and economic foundations, MENA countries frequently showcase shared attributes, prominently emphasizing family bonds, close-knit communities, and robust support networks as cornerstones of daily existence. The essence of these shared traits lies in a resolute commitment to familial and communal relationships, where kinship connections and reciprocal assistance are indispensable. The MENA region has faced a significant test of its resilience in the wake of the ongoing pandemic, which has brought about an unparalleled public health emergency. The region, heavily reliant on sectors like tourism, oil, and remittances, experienced substantial setbacks due to global travel restrictions and economic downturns. Millions of jobs were lost, contributing to increased unemployment rates and poverty levels. Moreover, the pandemic exposed structural weaknesses in healthcare systems, revealing the need for enhanced investment in healthcare infrastructure and resources to better manage public health emergencies. Furthermore, the pandemic disrupted traditional

Table 11.4 Pearson's correlation analysis among depression, anxiety, stress, and associated factors

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Depression										
2. Anxiety	0.700**									
3. Stress	0.745**	0.660**								
4. Gender	-0.142**	-0.113**	-0.152**							
5. Parent's age	0.119	0.034	0.093	0.163**						
6. Marital status	-0.061	-0.046	-0.075	0.193**	-0.411**					
7. Education level	-0.03	-0.032	-0.082	-0.077	-0.123*	0.002				
8. Employment status	-0.279**	-0.351**	-0.342**	0.231**	0.081	-0.066	-0.247**			
9. Parental status	0.112	-0.043	-0.036	-0.135**	0.125*	-0.201**	0.016	-0.047		
10. Family size	0.164	0.199*	0.149	0.105*	-0.021	0.414**	-0.011	-0.047	-0.04	
11. Medical vulnerabilities	0.472**	0.365**	0.364**	0.185**	0.325**	0.029	-0.151**	0.039	-0.07	0.012

** $p < 0.01$

communal practices, which are integral to the MENA region's fabric. Religious gatherings, family celebrations, and community events were curtailed, affecting social cohesion and a sense of belonging. The uncertainty and isolation resulting from lockdowns and social distancing measures led to heightened stress, anxiety, and depression. In this study, we identified the prevalence of elevated depression (48%), anxiety (88%), and psychological distress (16%) during initial lockdowns during the pandemic in Qatar.

Three critical pieces of evidence warrant a special mention in this context. Significant findings from this study warrant further discussion, including the significant differences in mental health outcomes between individuals based on their sociodemographic characteristics. Our findings suggest that socioeconomically disadvantaged families fared worse in mental health during initial lockdown than more affluent families. Unemployment, parent gender, and single parenthood were all associated with poor parental mental health (i.e., increased anxiety, depression, and stress). This is troubling, as it implies that the pandemic may have exacerbated socioeconomic disparities in mental health. We join other researchers in urging policymakers to prioritize vulnerable individuals' needs during pandemic recovery efforts, including strategies to address barriers to mental health service utilization and follow-up (Aragona et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021). Family structure also appears to affect families' mental health during the initial lockdown. More specifically, having more children/siblings in the home was associated with poorer mental health for parents.

In addition, multigenerational families were not associated with increased parental depression, anxiety, and stress. Our findings are consistent with those of recent studies highlighting the importance of multigenerational families for the health and well-being of members of each generation (Bengtson, 2001; Fingerman et al., 2020; Gilligan et al., 2020). Many studies had documented high levels of instrumental (e.g., help around the house, daily chores, caregiving), (2) financial (e.g., loaning or giving money), and (3) expressive (e.g., comfort, advice) exchanges among multigenerational families (Fingerman et al., 2020; Gilligan et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2017). Although multigenerational families may be a heightened source of potential disease contact during a lockdown, the eldest generation may be served as an important care provider for young children and emotional support for parents and often to allow parents to work outside the home (Gilligan et al., 2020). Thus, our findings suggest that multigenerational families' support will likely affect parental well-being during the crisis. To our knowledge, this study is the first to highlight the positive effects of multigenerational families on parental's mental health during the pandemic in the region.

In our study, mothers reported higher anxiety, depression, and stress levels than fathers during initial lockdown. Our findings corroborate those of numerous other recent studies indicating that COVID-19-related challenges have been particularly difficult on mothers, who have borne the brunt of increased child care, homeschooling, and other family and household demands (Wade et al., 2021; Zamarro & Prados, 2021). Recent research utilizing longitudinal datasets with maternal mental health data collected before the pandemic's onset demonstrates that the pandemic has

harmed mothers' mental health, particularly those who had difficulty accessing child care and/or lost family income or had low family income before the pandemic's onset (Racine et al., 2021). These findings emphasize the importance of developing programs and policies to assist mothers during the pandemic recovery process. This is critical because parental mental health challenges have been shown to be a risk factor for poor family functioning and poor emotional and behavioral health during the pandemic (Hussong et al., 2020), and our results support this understanding.

Limitations and Prospects

This study has a number of methodological limitations. Due to the pandemic's unprecedented and ever-changing nature, the pandemic's long-term mental health implications remain unknown. The current study's design precludes inferring a causal relationship between this novel socio-environmental factor and the observed mental health concerns. It is critical to continue monitoring and studying the pandemic's potential effects through longitudinal study designs to fully understand the relationship between the pandemic and observed outcomes and inform the development of interventions to prevent or mitigate adverse effects. While convenience sampling with parent and self-report questionnaires enabled effective data collection in a short period, it introduced concerns about external validity and biases such as selection bias, recall bias, and social desirability bias. Second, mental health is a multifaceted concept, and not all facets of mental health and illness were evaluated. Future research utilizing additional psychometrically sound mental health assessment measures is necessary to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the pandemic on mental health outcomes.

Additionally, there are numerous other individual characteristics (e.g., preexisting mental illnesses) that could have influenced whether or not an individual reported depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms. Finally, the sample's nature and extent limit its external validity. Despite these limitations, our study is one of the largest in Qatar, utilizing valid and reliable measures to assess anxiety and depression in parents during the initial lockdowns.

Policy Implications

Findings of this study indicate that concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbating mental health concerns for socially and economically vulnerable families in Qatar are warranted during the initial lockdown. Coordinated mental health and psychosocial support services must be integrated into the pandemic response efforts both during and after the pandemic to help mitigate adverse outcomes. Addressing mental health needs requires financial investments aligned with broad social and mental health policy goals such as lowering the incidence and prevalence of mental

disorders, developing rehabilitation services and other support programs, and reducing mental health stigma (Cratsley & Mackey, 2018). To achieve these goals, a three-pronged approach will be necessary: (1) national components (e.g., a national strategy to promote mental health, well-defined links between government agencies responsible for determinants of mental health and illness, and mental health legislation), (2) supportive infrastructure (e.g., addressing the social and economic determinants of poor mental health), and (3) service provision (e.g., healthcare clinics with primary providers). Restructuring mental health services and strengthening mental health initiatives to promote mental health in Qatar are complex but necessary tasks to address the burgeoning mental health needs created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Part IV
Adolescents' Transition to Adulthood
with Their Families

Chapter 12

Romantic Relationships, Dating Violence, and Sexism During Adolescence: A Cross-Cultural Case Study of Poland and the United States



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Introduction

Dating and romantic relationships are key milestones in the lives of adolescents. Romantic experiences, including the ups and downs of dating, courtship, and attraction, have important implications for adolescent well-being – potentially supporting positive outcomes (e.g., self-esteem) but also introducing risks that can have short- and longer-term consequences for socioemotional health. For these reasons, scholars note the importance of understanding these early relationships and addressing factors that contribute to their onset and quality.

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Various dimensions of adolescents' relationships, including conceptions of roles and expectations, are shaped in part by their experiences in their own families, the broader cultural context in which they are embedded, and the interaction between the two (Espinosa-Hernández et al., 2020). In this chapter, we review current research that looks at the interplay of various dimensions of culture, family life, and adolescents' romantic relationships. We describe our own culture comparative study that examines adolescents' notions about sexism and dating violence, two factors that impact the quality of romantic relationships, contrasting responses of youth from rural and urban communities in Poland and the United States. Further, we present implications for relationship education efforts in Poland and the United States. By examining these aforementioned issues, we aim to advance understanding of factors that impact adolescents' romantic relationships. We use a culture comparative study, as cultural context informs how people perceive and express gender, power, and violence in romantic relationships (Vescio & Kosakowska-Berezecka, 2020).

Overview of Dating, Romantic Relationships, and Sexuality During Adolescence

Establishing a romantic and sexual identity is a healthy aspect of adolescence and provides developmental benefits in the transition to adulthood (Suleiman & Harden, 2016). Romantic and sexual interactions provide adolescents the opportunity to learn to develop and maintain safe and healthy relationships into adulthood (Furman & Shaffer, 2003; Furman & Rose, 2015). However, romantic and sexual experiences during adolescence are also associated with negative consequences. Adolescents in romantic relationships may be more at risk for negative mental health outcomes (Soller, 2014), delinquency (Cui et al., 2012), and various forms of dating violence (Taylor & Xia, 2022). Altogether, the quality of romantic relationships during adolescence predicts commitment in and the quality of romantic relationships later in life (Collins et al., 2009). As such, developing healthy conceptions regarding dating and relationships in adolescence and fostering positive interactions is an essential part of adolescent development.

During adolescence, "romantic experiences" can include attraction toward others and interactions with potential partners. Romantic experiences do not need to occur directly with a partner and can include related feelings and cognitions, as well as actual experiences with others. Additionally, nonromantic sexual relations (informally referred to by many adolescents as "hooking up") may also occur during this developmental period as a form of sexual exploration, expression, and intrigue. These sexual experiences do not always occur in committed relationships (Furman & Collins, 2008; Manning et al., 2006). Many begin to initiate "romantic relationships," which is a comprehensive term that refers to both long- or short-term mutually agreed-upon interactions with a partner. These relationships are marked by affection and current or anticipated sexual behavior (Collins et al., 2009).

Adolescent Dating, Romantic Relationships, and Sexuality in the Global Context

Romantic relationships are informed by, and intertwined with the broader context in which families live. For adolescents, this means their understanding of romantic relationships and behaviors within relationships is informed by their family, community, and cultural context. Several studies have been conducted on adolescent romantic relationships both in a culture comparative approach and within-culture in various cultural contexts. Most studies have collected data solely from secondary schools or university samples (e.g., Ciairano et al., 2006; Courtain & Glowacz, 2021). Fewer studies have explored various location contexts (i.e., rural, urban) within different country contexts. Additionally, numerous studies have explored immigrant youths' experiences and perceptions toward romantic relationships within the context of their new communities (e.g., King & Harris, 2007; Mondain & Lardoux, 2013).

Perceptions Toward and Acceptance of Adolescent Romantic Relationships Adolescent romantic relationships across countries vary considerably in timing of onset, perceptions, expectations, and norms around behaviors therein. Cross-cultural research suggests that the onset of romantic attraction toward others begins at approximately 13 years of age around the globe (Bowker et al., 2020; Espinosa-Hernández et al., 2020). Though the onset of attraction starts at a consistent age around the globe, the onset of dating and romantic relationships begin at different ages.

In Western societies, such as the United States and Canada, dating is generally considered normative and is acknowledged as an integral part of adolescence (Collins, 2003). Navigating and learning from dating during adolescence is perceived to contribute to personal growth and relationship skills for adulthood (Collins & Van Dulmen, 2006). However, even within Western societies, there are differences between groups in romantic behaviors and experiences. For example, Asian American adolescents in the United States are less likely to have had a romantic partner in the previous 18 months compared to other racial and ethnic groups (Carver et al., 2003).

Generally, youth in non-Western societies tend to enter into romantic relationships later than their Western peers and have sexual relations in later relationship stages (Connolly & McDonald, 2020; Espinosa-Hernández et al., 2020). The notion that romantic relationships during adolescence pose risks to adolescents is held in many places around the world. Many collectivist cultures emphasize family bonds and devote their energy toward strengthening family relationships. For instance, one study by Li et al. (2010) found that Chinese adolescents are less likely to participate in romantic relationships, compared to Canadian adolescents. The study also found that Chinese adolescents who did have romantic partners were less intimate, trusting, and companionable compared to the Canadian adolescents, as Chinese adolescents saved most of their emotional connections for their family. Overall, this onset

depends on family, cultural, and religious expectations and approvals in an adolescent's environment. Yet, it should be noted that few youth begin engaging in romantic relationships prior to the age of 13 anywhere in the world (De Meyer et al., 2017).

Moreover, families and cultural context influence who is viewed as a suitable partner. In Western societies, like the United States and Europe, adolescents tend to have more agency in selecting their partner but typically seek out their family's approval to maintain and further progress the relationship. Most adolescents desire the approval of those in their social network. Parents in some racial and ethnic groups are also more likely to supervise their child's dating behaviors, such as Latinx parents of adolescent girls (O'Sullivan & Meyer-Bahlburg, 2003). In contrast, families of adolescents in many Asian and sub-Saharan African societies have a larger role in identifying suitable partners. For instance, many families in India still arrange their child's partnerships. Arranged marriage is not synonymous with forced marriage, as more families today seek their child's input when arranging a marriage than in previous generations. Families tend to select partners, or encourage their child toward potential partners, that belong to the same religion and social class (Pande, 2015).

When adolescents begin engaging in sexual activity, they typically do so within the context of romantic relationships (Manning et al., 2000). Historically, many adolescents have held views that sexual interactions should occur within the context of stable, committed relationships. These beliefs are informed by family and cultural values on the role of women in relationships, and many cultures around the globe still hold these views toward women and sexual intimacy. However, women across many cultures have begun to view sex not merely as a duty to reproduce and provide their male partners with pleasure but as a mutually pleasurable experience for both partners, where reproduction need not be the goal.

Cultural and family context also inform parent-child communication and openness regarding adolescent dating relationships. In an earlier study looking at communication practices around experiences of adolescents, most youth in rural US communities reported that they did not disclose their romantic relationships to their parents, and many parents did not inquire about their children's dating behaviors (Taylor et al., 2021). Findings further suggested that lack of communication regarding adolescent dating was linked to parents' feeling of discomfort and uncertainty on how to initiate dialogue regarding the issue. Conversations regarding sexual activity among adolescents were generally absent among rural families, though many adolescents reported having been sexually active. Lack of communication was evident even when parents were aware of and supported their children's dating relationships (Taylor et al., 2021).

Adolescent Dating Violence

Though adolescent romantic relationships offer developmental benefits, these relationships can also increase adolescents' risk for dating violence. Conceptualizations of adolescent dating violence have expanded in recent years. Historically, scholars

and global agencies have focused efforts on physical and sexual dating violence. Today, most agencies recognize the broad ways dating violence can be perpetrated in romantic relationships, including physical, sexual, and psychological violence, control and manipulation, economic abuse, and cyber abuse.

The World Health Organization (2021) estimates that one in four girls between the ages of 15 and 19 experience physical or sexual dating violence at least once in their lifetime. This estimate does not include psychological or emotional dating violence, the most common form of dating violence, suggesting prevalence rates around the globe are likely higher. Recent research from rural adolescents in the United States found higher prevalence rates of many forms of dating violence. In a recent study, over 63% of the adolescent sample had experienced verbal dating violence, and over 60% had experienced cyber dating violence. In all, over 80% of the sample had experienced at least one form of dating violence from a romantic partner in their lifetime (Taylor & Xia, 2022).

It should also be noted that there may be underreports of dating violence in many countries due to the context of relationships and the environment for reporting violence. Specifically, fear of reporting, particularly for sexual minority adolescents, contribute to underreports (Gillum & DiFulvio, 2012). Likewise, a family or community's acceptance of rape myths where victims are blamed may prevent many victims from reporting out of fear that the fault will fall on them (Kelly & Stermac, 2008). Other factors including the stigma and shame of being in a violent relationship and lack of awareness of how and where to report likely contribute to underreports of dating violence. Additionally, although most global efforts have focused on adolescent women as victims of dating violence, much due to gender and power structures that result in women having fewer resources, adolescent men are not immune and experience dating violence as well.

Studies on dating violence around the globe have documented the wide range of health consequences for adolescents, including depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, drug and alcohol abuse, and higher risk for HIV diagnosis (Barros et al., 2011; Taquette & Monteiro, 2019). Survivors of dating violence are also more likely to experience abuse in relationships later in adulthood and have a higher likelihood of femicide by intimate partners or ex-partners (i.e., gender-based violence that results in murder) (Marcuello-Servós et al., 2016). In addition to the impact on survivors' health and safety, dating violence negatively impacts educational attainment and a person's ability to work, which has negative impacts on a country's economic and labor market (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, 2020).

Predictors of Adolescent Dating Violence

The high prevalence rates and serious impacts of dating violence have encouraged many scholars to further explore predictors of adolescent dating violence. Understanding and addressing predictors of dating violence are elements that may

support healthy relationship development into adulthood. In this chapter, we focus on two predictors, sexism and attitudes toward dating violence.

Sexism and Attitude Toward Dating Violence

Romantic relationships are directly influenced by gender (in)equality in an adolescents' context. Consequently, sexism has a considerable influence on adolescent development and romantic relationships, as sexism is a main factor sustaining gender inequalities between men and women (Glick & Fiske, 2001). Sexism includes both positive-toned (benevolent sexism) and negative-toned (hostile sexism) perceptions about women and men and reinforces traditional gender roles. Benevolent sexism is often perceived to be positive, where attitudes revolve around chivalry and protecting women, yet this sexism is still rooted in male dominance and power. Hostile sexism is typically perceived to be negative, as it includes blatant prejudice and hostility about women and men (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

Both forms of sexism are harmful for all genders, as they reinforce traditional gender norms and expectations for how people should behave and interact in relationships. During adolescence, men and women draw from gender scripts and stereotypes that they have learned from their family, peers, school, or other social contexts (Louis et al., 2013). For instance, adolescent men tend to develop positive attitudes toward stereotypical feminine traits (e.g., sensitivity, warmth) and negative attitudes toward adolescent women who do not present stereotypical feminine traits (e.g., competitive, career-oriented) (Glick et al., 2000). Likewise, adolescent women are oftentimes more attracted to adolescent men that exhibit more benevolent sexism (e.g., take the initiative, chivalrous) (Montañés et al., 2013). Previous research indicates that sexist attitudes are reinforced and strengthened in the context of adolescent romantic relationships to meet gender stereotypes adolescents learned during childhood (de Lemus et al., 2015).

Sexist attitudes are a well-documented predictor of adolescent dating violence across cultures (Ramiro-Sánchez et al., 2018). Research has consistently revealed that individuals with higher hostile sexism are more likely to support relationship violence as a way to maintain power and control (e.g., Valor-Segura et al., 2011). Likewise, higher benevolent sexism is associated with victim-blaming and minimizing violence toward women (Abrams et al., 2003). Waltermaurer (2012) contends that partner violence occurs across cultures but attitude toward violence is influenced by local cultural beliefs. Attitudes on the role of women in a society impact whether the community condones the use of partner violence and whether victims are supported if they seek help. Although research has explored sexism and relationship violence across cultural contexts, most of this work has focused on adult samples in urban contexts (e.g., Glick et al., 2000).

Our Research in Poland and the United States

We share selected findings from our research with adolescents in Poland and the United States, with particular focus on findings related to sexism and attitudes toward adolescent dating relationships. Our research was conducted with adolescents across various rural villages and urban cities in Poland and the United States. The goal of our study was to examine differences in sexist attitudes and attitude toward ADV across Poland and the United States. Poland and the United States share similarities and differences, making these two contexts ideal for cross-cultural research. Both countries are higher income (World Bank, 2021), yet both have lower levels of gender equity compared to other high-income countries in Europe and North America. The United States ranks 30th in the world in gender equity, whereas Poland ranks 75th (World Economic Forum, 2021).

At the time of data collection (2017–2018 in the United States; 2018 in Poland), both countries were experiencing shifts in their sociopolitical landscapes. Adolescents in both countries were faced with the reckoning of rights for women, immigrants, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and other marginalized groups. Adolescents were developing understandings of relationships and learning to form relationships in the height of these social movements (Seemiller & Grace, 2017), which often diverged from traditional familial and community expectations, particularly in rural areas (Pietrzak & Mikołajczak, 2015). For instance, many women in Poland were protesting proposed bans on abortion around the same time we were conducting our research (Korolczuk, 2016; Nacher, 2021). Likewise, we collected data in the United States not long after the 2016 presidential election that sparked protests for women's rights and other social justice issues (Fisher et al., 2017).

Prior to our data collection, we established relationships with, and obtained permissions from educators, school administrators, counselors, and youth program directors to distribute our surveys. Surveys were comprised of quantitative measures and qualitative open-ended questions to assess adolescents' experiences and attitudes toward dating, sexism, and violence in relationships. In all, we collected surveys from 256 adolescents in Poland (42% men, 58% women; 47.2% rural, 52.8% urban) and 208 adolescents in the United States (42% men, 58% women; 71.8% rural, 28.2% urban).

Sexism in Poland and the United States

Our research in Poland and the United States revealed that adolescents report relatively strong sexist attitudes toward relationships. Most areas in Poland and the United States, especially rural regions, tend to hold traditional and conservative views toward relationships and families (Ulrich-Schad & Duncan, 2018). Even

though women in Poland have obtained higher levels of education compared to decades past, women still perform the majority of child-rearing and household duties (e.g., Mikołajczak & Pietrzak, 2015). Similarly, families in the United States, particularly in rural and smaller communities, model and encourage traditional gender expectations within the home and in relationships (Kazyak, 2012). Our research results revealed that Polish adolescents who grew up in rural communities expressed stronger hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes compared to adolescents from urban communities. Likewise, rural adolescents in the United States reported significantly stronger benevolent sexist attitudes compared to their urban peers. Altogether, most adolescents in our study across rural and urban Poland and the United States reported sexist attitudes toward gender and relationships. For instance, our results revealed the following:

- Approximately two in three adolescent participants from Poland and the United States believe women should be protected and cherished by men.
- Over half of adolescent participants from both Poland and the United States believe every man should have a woman to adore.
- Half of participants in Poland and seven in ten participants in the United States believe men should sacrifice their own well-being so they can provide financially for the women in their lives.

Additionally, across both countries, we found that adolescent men hold stronger hostile sexism compared to adolescent women.

When we examined differences between Poland and the United States, adolescents in Poland reported stronger hostile sexist attitudes compared to adolescents in the United States. The sociopolitical context in Poland may partially explain these differences. As the world transitions to more egalitarianism, families in Central and Eastern Europe have sustained traditional views toward gender and relationships over the last few decades (Stickney & Konrad, 2007). As a result, Polish adolescents, particularly in rural areas, may be more exposed to traditional gender roles and sexist attitudes during socialization within the family and community context (Zawisza et al., 2015).

Interestingly, our findings on benevolent sexism strayed from much previous research. Research findings typically show that when men report stronger hostile sexism, women report stronger benevolent sexism as a way of protecting themselves against misogynistic attitudes and threats (Glick et al., 2000). However, we did not see this trend in either Poland or the United States, as adolescent women reported lower benevolent sexism compared to adolescent men. Recent research has indicated that in countries where women have more opportunities and rights, they often report lower levels of benevolent sexism; they have the opportunity to challenge ideologies that contradict gender equity, and thus, they may not feel driven to endorse benevolent sexism (Huang et al., 2019).

Attitudes Toward Dating Violence in Poland and the United States

Understanding attitudes toward romantic relationships and dating violence is one element that may support healthy relationship development into adulthood. Our research in Poland and the United States measured attitudes toward physical and sexual dating violence, as well as attitudes toward emotional and verbal dating violence. Our findings suggest that many adolescents in both countries hold misconceptions and unhealthy attitudes about romantic relationships. For instance, one in three adolescents in Poland and one in four in the United States believe that if their partner acts jealous, it shows “true love.” Previous research indicates that jealousy in relationships can stem from various emotions, including fear, sadness, and anger in a relationship. Jealousy can manifest in relationships in both positive and negative ways, from increased expressions of affection to forms of violence (Guerrero et al., 2005). We also found that one in five Polish adolescents agreed that “If you did something wrong, it is your fault if you get hit,” whereas less than one in ten adolescents in the United States agreed. We are unsure why there was a different trend in responses between our two samples for this question, when participants’ responses were fairly consistent across other questions. One probable explanation may be the higher visible presence of domestic violence in Poland, particularly in rural areas (CBOS, 2019).

In addition, more participants from our study support the use of emotional and verbal dating violence compared to physical and sexual dating violence. This finding was not surprising, as global conversations surrounding topics of sexual assault, rape, and “wife beating” have increased in previous decades and most violence prevention efforts through local and global agencies target physical and sexual violence. On a similar note, we found that nine in ten adolescents in both our Poland and US samples recognize that dating violence includes more than just physical abuse.

Moreover, we were interested in exploring if adolescents across the two countries held similar views toward dating violence. We chose to explore country, gender, and location (rural vs. urban) differences among adolescents in Poland and the United States. Overall, we did find significant differences in attitudes between adolescents in Poland and the United States, though gender appeared to be the stronger predictor. Adolescent men in both countries reported more supportive attitudes toward physical and sexual dating violence and emotional and verbal dating violence compared to adolescent women. Our analysis revealed that Polish men had significantly stronger attitudes supporting physical and sexual dating violence compared to Polish women ($p < 0.001$). There were similar findings in the United States, where adolescent men had significantly more supportive attitude toward the use of physical and sexual dating violence compared to adolescent women ($p < 0.001$). This trend may be influenced by the contexts in both countries where women have greater access to education, work, and opportunities to participate in movements for

women's equity now compared to the past (Mikołajczak & Pietrzak, 2015; Ulrich-Schad & Duncan, 2018).

When we examined cross-country differences for attitude toward physical and sexual dating violence, we found that adolescent men in Poland were more likely to support the use of physical and sexual dating violence in relationships compared to adolescent men in the United States ($p < 0.001$). We did not find significant differences between adolescent women in Poland and the United States. This finding perhaps suggests that adolescent women in Poland and the United States are emerging in similar family and sociopolitical contexts, resulting in similar attitudes toward dating violence. However, adolescent men in Poland may be more challenged with shifting gender dynamics and may be more likely to view the use of physical and sexual ADV in relationships as permissible and as a way to maintain power and control over women. This finding is consistent with research that suggests men in many egalitarian contexts often have greater hostile sexism and perpetrate violence against women when they feel women's progress violates their power and dominance (Gracia & Merlo, 2016; Kosakowska-Berezecka et al., 2020).

We also examined differences in attitudes toward emotional and verbal dating violence by gender and country. We found that Polish adolescents had significantly stronger attitude supporting emotional and verbal dating violence compared to US adolescents ($p < 0.05$). Additionally, adolescent men in both countries had significantly stronger attitudes supporting emotional and verbal dating violence compared to adolescent women in both countries. When we included the location variable (rural vs. urban), we found that in rural Poland, adolescent women are more supportive of emotional and verbal dating violence but adolescent men are more supportive in urban Poland. Adolescent women in rural Poland may hold views that emotional and verbal dating violence are valid means to control women and maintain traditional family expectations.

Implications and Conclusion

Findings from our research, as well as previous research on adolescent dating and romantic relationships, unequivocally suggest the need for relationship education that covers topics of safe and healthy romantic and sexual relationships. This section details implications for practice related to adolescent romantic relationships. These implications aim to provide suggestions and insight to support the development and delivery of relationship education efforts for adolescents.

Currently, education efforts for healthy adolescent relationships look different around the globe depending upon the location and culture. There are discrepancies around the world in content, delivery, and access to relationship education content. For instance, in some regions of the globe, adolescents are viewed to be "rights-holders" to education, where people are entitled to knowledge in order to experience

healthy and thriving romantic relationships. In other regions, there is a lack of accessible, reliable, and accurate information for adolescents (Boonstra, 2011; Campbell, 2016). Findings from our research confirm the need for relationship education efforts to support rural and urban youth in developing skills for safe and healthy romantic relationships. We asked adolescents in our Polish sample how confident they feel developing and maintaining a romantic relationship. Just over half of participants (58%) are confident that they can have “a stable, long-term relationship” and that they have the skills needed for a stable romantic relationship (55%).

Additionally, the topics of dating, adolescent relationships, and sexual activity can be sensitive for some families to discuss, and thus, many families are reluctant for their children to participate in education surrounding these topics. This may be particularly true in more rural and traditional communities. In the rural communities where our research was conducted, families tend to be more conservative and religious. Parents in these contexts are more likely to argue that children should not learn about sex and relationships in schools or other educational settings; rather, these topics should be taught by parents within the home. Though experts agree that families should be involved in this education, the literature suggests that when parents are the sole providers of this information, children are less likely to receive the education or learn accurate and comprehensive information (Goldfarb et al., 2018). Consequently, relationship-building with parents is critical to reach adolescents with accurate information. Other gatekeepers to the community may also provide access to adolescents and encourage this education, such as religious or spiritual leaders, teachers, and local healthcare providers. These leaders shape community values and behaviors and can be partners in encouraging change.

Additionally, the expanding technology access around the globe enables the distribution of evidence-based, reliable information. For children and adolescents in locations where healthy relationship education is not funded, offered, or comprehensive, these youth can be reached through online programming if technology and the Internet are accessible. Reliable information can be shared through platforms that are popular with young people today, such as YouTube and TikTok.

Our research also suggests the need to target sexist attitudes and challenge stereotypical gender roles through education. Findings from our research raise questions on how to educate youth on healthy relationships and concepts of gender in more traditional contexts. This education should start with young children in order to foster healthy attitudes early before attitudes become engrained. Programming can include examples of adults who challenge gender stereotypes, such as women who are leaders in the community and men who are primary caretakers. Likewise, programming can target misconceptions about gender equity as only a women’s issue and instead share information on how gender equity benefits both men and women. This messaging can be anchored around improving the health and economic stability of children, families, and communities. Professionals delivering this education should also emphasize the qualities of a healthy relationship. Content and activities can be included to help youth develop skills for maintaining a healthy relationship and healthy conflict resolution.

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Chapter 13

Adolescent Autonomy and Parent-Adolescent Communication: A Comparative Critical Review of English, Chinese, and Spanish Literature



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Introduction

Adolescent building up a sense of autonomy is one of the most important developmental tasks, which could be shaped through the parent-adolescent interactions and communication (Roche et al., 2014). This chapter addresses the development of adolescent autonomy, the parent-adolescent communication, and the autonomy within the family context across different cultures. Many studies have conventionally focused on analyzing them on an individual level or sociodemographic perspectives (e.g., socioeconomic position, ethnic background). However, as a means of socialization and emotional bonding, the development of autonomy and parent-adolescent communication that may facilitate it could only be fully understood in the broad social context where both parents and adolescents are situated and interact. The socioecological model or human ecological model proposed by Bronfenbrenner (2005) responds to this analytical demand, as it suggests that the understanding of an individual's development should consider the impact of surrounding environments embedded in multiple social systems, including both immediate (e.g., family, school) and indirect contextual (e.g., culture, social norms) settings. Through the bidirectional interactions among different subsystems,

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individuals shape and are shaped by the social environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

This chapter first aims to describe the experiences of adolescent autonomy development and parent-adolescent communication, studied by scholars from three regions whose cultures are very different: the United States, China, and Latin American and the Caribbean (LAC) societies. We have recognized that there is a plethora of non-English articles that English-speaking scholars may not have access to because of the language barrier, and may overlook or ignore, and vice versa with Spanish- or Chinese-speaking scholars. Therefore, we intentionally choose and analyze the studies carried out in these countries and regions and published in English, Chinese, and Spanish. We assume that the description of these research findings in three languages could contribute to the understanding of adolescents' experiences regarding autonomy development, parental autonomy granting, and parent-adolescent communication through a multicultural and global lens. We discern the universality and variations of these experiences across different cultural, socioeconomic, and political contexts and more importantly understand the common theoretical and methodological propositions that have guided much of the research in this field globally. As the dominant adolescent development theories and research are published in English, these theories are mainly grounded in perspectives emphasizing universal needs and processes toward autonomy, self-development, and individualism originated from the Western cultural context. In addition to the description, we ask whether or what cultural blind spots and biases possibly exist in studying the experiences of adolescents growing up in Chinese and LAC families.

The second aim of this chapter is to analyze whether these Western approaches prevail in guiding Chinese and LAC research and to discuss some of the challenging theoretical and methodological issues found. We intend to provide an overview of the research on adolescent autonomy and parent-adolescent communication conducted in these three regions and possible theoretical and methodological biases and cultural blind spots and challenges in studying adolescents within the family in the non-Western cultural context using critical analysis and comparative approach.

Method

Addressing our aims within the socioecological framework, this chapter conducts a multilingual critical review through a comparative approach, reviewing and analyzing studies in English, Chinese, and Spanish, and from Chinese and LAC scholars. This enables us to access a broader range of sources and perspectives to explore adolescent experiences in three different cultural contexts, which could be potentially reducing language and cultural biases (e.g., Newnham et al., 2022; Wolff

et al., 2021). To obtain articles that pertain to our topics of adolescent autonomy and parent-adolescent communication, inclusion, exclusion, and stopping criteria were established by bilingual authors for three language databases and searching processes. Inclusion criteria include (1) empirical research with available abstract published in peer-reviewed journals and book chapters; (2) articles published in English, Chinese, and Spanish; (3) articles published from 2005 to 2021; (4) research that focus on parent-adolescent relationship, communication, and interactions, especially of how parents perceive and impact on adolescent's autonomy and their participation in family decision-making process; and (5) research involving families with adolescents who aged from 10 to 19. We then established the following exclusion criteria: (1) non-journal articles and nonempirical studies, such as literature review, dissertations, meta-analysis, and commentaries, (2) research that was conducted under clinical settings or focus on pediatric and medical conditions (e.g., vaccination, cancer, disorder, disability, congenital diseases), (3) research that only discuss specific variables (e.g., autonomy, decision-making, psychological adjustment) but neither combined with family context nor include adolescents and parents, (4) studies that did not involve parent-adolescent relationships and interactions within families and only focused on demographical family variables (e.g., family socioeconomic status, parental education level), and (5) research that aim to evaluate intervention and prevention programs for families, so that the current review focuses on observational studies.

During the pilot searching processes with inclusion and exclusion criteria, we noticed that the articles ranked in later pages of the outputs' searches were less relevant to our topic; therefore, we further adopted a stopping criterion. While conducting the searching in databases, we screened each abstract with the relevance ranking filter in the database and stopped the screening when there were 20 consecutive abstracts considered irrelevant based on our inclusion and exclusion criteria. For Chinese literature searching process, our research team conducted ten searches with three groups of keywords in three databases that are abundant in Chinese literature and widely used by Chinese scholars, including China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), Google Scholar, and Baidu Academic. For English literature, we conducted 12 searches with 3 groups of keywords in 4 databases relevant to adolescent and family research, including ERIC, PubMed, PsycInfo, and Web of Science. For Spanish literature, we conducted 12 searches with 4 groups of keywords in EBSCO, JSTOR, Redalyc, SciELO, Proquest Social Sciences, and Google Scholar. We assigned our keywords into different groups for search due to the large number of specified keywords related to digital technology and constraints on the number of keywords allowed for advance search in some databases. Our team ended up with 178 empirical articles written in English focusing on Western societies, 115 written in Chinese focusing on Chinese adolescents, and 83 in Spanish focusing on LAC adolescents. See Table 13.1 for the detailed information about groups of keywords for the literature search in three languages.

Table 13.1 Groups of keywords for literature search in three languages

Language	Keywords		In title
	In abstract		
English	Adolescent AND parent AND	Decision-making OR autonomy OR independence OR communication OR parent-adolescent relationship OR psychological control OR parenting styles OR parenting adolescents	NOT clinical OR medical OR intervention OR counseling OR pediatric OR cancer In *Title*
		Family dynamic OR family interaction OR family rule	
		Development OR well-being OR psychological adjustment OR emotional functioning OR emotional skills OR mental health OR school performance OR school grades OR life skills OR dating and healthy intimate relationship (relational health)	
		Volitional functioning OR individuation	
Chinese	青少年 (adolescent) OR 父母 (parents) AND	决策 (decision-making) OR 自主性 (autonomy) OR 独立 (Independence) OR 青少年亲子沟通 (parent-adolescent communication) OR 青少年亲子互动 (parent-adolescent interaction) OR 青少年亲子关系 (parent-adolescent relationship) OR 心理控制 (psychological control) OR 管教 (discipline) OR 父母教养方式 (Parenting styles) OR 青少年教养 (adolescent rearing)	NOT 临床 (clinical) OR 医药 (medical) OR 干预 (intervention) OR 咨询 (counseling) OR 儿科 (pediatric) OR 癌症 (cancer)
		家庭动力 (family dynamics) OR 家庭互动 (family interactions) OR 家庭规则 (family rules)	
		发展 (development) OR 主观幸福感 (subjective well-being) OR 幸福感 (Well-being) OR 心理适应 (psychological adaptation) OR 情绪功能 (emotional functioning) OR 情绪智力 (emotional intelligence) OR 心理健康 (mental health) OR 学习成绩 (academic performance) OR 生活技能 (life skills) OR 发展健康的亲密关系的知识和能力 (knowledge and ability to develop healthy intimate relationships)	

(continued)

Table 13.1 (continued)

Language	Keywords		In title
	In abstract		
Spanish	Adolescentes o padres o padres y (adolescents or parents or parents and)	Socialización o crianza o practicas de crianza o parentalidad o estilos de parentalidad o estrategias de educación (Socialization or rearing or rearing practices or parenting or parenting or parenting styles or education strategies)	NOT clínico (clinical) OR médico (medical) OR intervención (intervention) In *Title*
		Toma de decisiones o autonomía o independencia o comunicación padres-adolescentes o comunicación familiar o relaciones padres-adolescentes o control psicológico o disciplina (decision-making or autonomy or independence or parent-adolescent communication or family communication or parent-adolescent relationships or psychological control or discipline)	
		Dinámica familiar o cohesion familiar o conflicto familiar o solución de problemas o autoridad familiar (family dynamic or family cohesion or family conflict or family solving problems or authority)	
		Desarrollo o ajuste o competencia social o ajuste psicológico, o salud mental o estrategias de afrontamiento (development or adjustment or social competence or psychological adjustment or mental health or coping strategies)	

Sociocultural and Historical Background

The human ecological model considers the social and cultural contexts when studying individual's development and family dynamics. Analyzing these contexts in three different regions and countries would be extremely complex and goes beyond the limits and aims of this paper. However, we can identify some of their sociocultural trends, which have contributed to the ethno-parental theories and socially desired adolescent outcomes. The US culture has a strong liberal tradition that emphasizes individual rights, while at the same time its Protestant religious culture highlights community and relational ties. In this framework, the family is highly valued but is often in tension with values related to individual rights and individuality.

In contrast with the United States, Chinese society underlines communitarian values, reinforced by Asian philosophies, such as Confucianism in which filial piety is emphasized in family and extended family context (Ma & Li, 2016; Sun et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2018a). In recent decades, however, Western ideologies exalting

individual rights and Western values have introduced major changes (Ma & Li, 2016; Sun et al., 2020). They seem to have promoted individual success especially in the economic, academic, and social domains. Nevertheless, community values associated with traditional or spiritual philosophies seem to remain strong; they emphasize the importance of family, respect for elders, harmony, hierarchy, and obedience (Ma & Li, 2016; Sun et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2018b). Meanwhile, there appears to be a large gender inequality.

The Latin American and Caribbean region of our study includes the Spanish-speaking population of Latin American and Caribbean countries (LAC)¹ and the Spanish-speaking people with Latino cultural background living in the United States. LAC countries share some cultural traits, as most of them were colonized in the fifteenth century by the Spanish empire and were under its rule for three centuries. The colonial legacy introduced – through slavery and peonage, inhumane working conditions, the extinction of many indigenous groups, and forced conversion to Catholicism – strong inequalities that ruled social relationships in different institutional settings, including the family. The forms of social functioning among LA indigenous groups changed in significant ways. The introduction of Catholicism influenced the definition of marriage and family and the legal system associated with their functioning. A patriarchal system has prevailed, and Catholic marriage was the only legal and religious bond recognized. Therefore, controlling practices and hierarchical patterns have molded behaviors and relationships within the family. During the twentieth century, important changes gradually took place in parenting dynamics and family life, resulting from an increasing institutional, civic, social, rather than religious, order. Industrialization, urbanization, and globalization further promoted individualization processes and Western values among middle and upper classes. However, along with these changes, there has been a persistent traditional culture among all social sectors that reinforces family bonds, and a sense of belonging to primary groups, while reproducing strong gender and age inequalities (Esteinou, 1999, 2008; Therborn, 2007, 2012), rigid hierarchies, and controlling behaviors.

Indeed, the current deep inequalities based on race, gender, ethnic group, and socioeconomic status have been rooted in LAC historical processes of colonialism and economic dependence on Western countries. Unlike other socioecological contexts, like China and the United States, the familial hierarchical relationships and controlling behaviors come from these two historical sources of inequality and poverty. They have molded ethno-parental theories, parenting practices, cultural expectations regarding children and adolescents' development, and expected socialization outcomes. They have favored hierarchical relationships among genders and parents and children. Thus, authoritarian parenting and obedience from children have been common in the past as well as traditional parenting (Baumrind, 1996), based on strong parent-child hierarchy but also on caring love. Moreover, poverty and inequality have engendered high psychosocial stress within family life leading often to authoritarianism, negligence, and violence (Selin, 2014), along with other support and nurturing practices.

¹As Portuguese is the main speaking language of Brazil, it was not included in the search.

Experiences of Adolescent Autonomy and Parent-Adolescent Communication

The study of autonomy development and parent-adolescent communication has been challenging, especially when different sociocultural contexts are considered. In this section, we present the main findings reported by the native scholars, which depict in some way the adolescent experiences within the family in these three countries/regions. Our perspective departs from recent research by analyzing cross-cultural differences in two distinct dimensions: autonomy as independence and autonomy as volitional functioning. The first one is rooted in the separation-individuation theory proposed by Blos (1979) and refers to the degree to which adolescents decide, act, or think without relying on others (e.g., parents). The second dimension is grounded in self-determination theory and its underpinning concepts of psychological need for autonomy and the autonomous motivation. Currently, there is an increasing claim that both dimensions of autonomy must be clearly differentiated and carefully considered in adolescence research (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Smetana, 2018; Soenens et al., 2018). One important justification for such a claim is that autonomy as independence is defined in interpersonal terms, as it entails how much adolescents depend on others and on someone who is regulating their behavior (the parent, the adolescent, or both), whereas autonomy as volitional functioning involves a perspective focused on within-person concordance, that is, the degree to which behavior or goals are aligned with one's deeply held values, preferences, and interests (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Soenens et al., 2018). Therefore, research on both dimensions of autonomy may be complementary and can provide more comprehensive information regarding adolescent autonomy development in different sociocultural contexts. Although research has shown that independent decision-making is less prevalent in the so-called collectivistic societies, it has also been found that volitional autonomy is relevant and essential for well-being across cultures (Soenens et al., 2018).

Adolescent Autonomy

According to the conceptualization originated from Western societies, adolescence is an important developmental stage that involves significant physical, cognitive, and psychological changes. It is often a period that tends to be marked by increased levels of tension and parent-adolescent conflicts within families (Branje, 2018; Brković et al., 2014; Dittman et al., 2020). Autonomy during adolescence is referred to the sense of being a separated, independent, and self-governing individual. Parents and peers under family and school contexts are often considered as agents of influences on youth autonomy development. It is also closely related to an individual's self-identity and self-efficacy. Adolescents' attainment of autonomy through parent-adolescent interactions is often considered as one of the most

important developmental tasks during adolescence, which is perceived as the second stage of separation-individuation from parents (Roche et al., 2014).

Research suggests that during this stage, adolescents in the majority U.S. families increasingly seek independence and autonomy from parents. At the meantime, parents start to have less authority and control over their adolescent children. Numerous studies have found that the conflict and tensions between parents and children are likely to reach a peak during their adolescence period. It was mainly characterized by reciprocal disagreement, low relationship satisfaction, and disrupted behavioral opposition (Dittman et al., 2020). Scholars found that when parents and adolescents use constructive strategies (e.g., problem-solving, compromise), family disagreement and negotiation process will provide opportunities for adolescents who will later transition to adulthood by teaching them how to negotiate and resolve conflict effectively (Smetana, 2005). Benign communication between parents and adolescents can promote family connectedness, adolescent autonomy, and their positive identity development (Zhao et al., 2015). In addition, it may promote and enhance autonomy development as volitional functioning. Even though efforts have been made in investigating the relations between parenting (e.g., autonomy granting) and adolescent developmental outcomes, there have been insufficient literature and research regarding parent-adolescent communications during the negotiating processes within families (Xia et al., 2004).

Chinese parents are known for using less autonomy-granting behaviors and more controlling strategies within the household compared to Western parents (Chen et al., 2017; Lan et al., 2019a, b). Differentiated with the research results from Western cultural backgrounds, scholars found that many Chinese adolescents would perceive the parental controlling behaviors as an expression of love (Kho et al., 2019; Lan et al., 2019a; Leung & Shek, 2019). For example, Putnick et al. (2012) found that parenting in China is characterized by more authoritarian styles that grant adolescents less autonomy, while parents in Jordan and Sweden tend to encourage adolescent autonomy through parenting practices. In align with the cultural norms, adolescent development of independence and volitional functioning were not valued in Chinese society by most of parents, educational system, and researchers. The fulfillment of individuation is considered by parents as a natural outcome which will eventually happen in an autonomous way. In other words, autonomy as independence is often considered as a natural transition to adulthood by most Chinese parents (Wu & Fang, 2006). Parents do not realize the need to cultivate youth's individuation and life skills. While parents have expectations for their children in making good life choices (e.g., getting married, finding a good job), they grant fewer opportunities for their children to make their own choices (Gong, 2020; Wu & Fang, 2006; Yu et al., 2013). Therefore, these "sheltered" Chinese adolescents receive less but attempt to obtain more opportunities of practices, such as making decision by themselves in daily life events. Many other Chinese adolescents, mostly from low-income and rural families, must make decisions on their own without parental consultation either because they drop out of school due to poverty or poor grades and seek for employment away from their families or because their parents left their villages for work and supporting their families (Xu & Xia,

2014). In both cases, adolescents are likely to step in the college life or embark on independent living without learning how to manage their lives. The development and nurture of autonomy and independence for adolescents is expected but their training to be independent is thus overlooked or does not exist.

Although Chinese adolescent autonomy is less emphasized in general, individuals and families in China tend to emphasize closer bonds with family members compared with Western societies (Ma & Li, 2016). Studies show adolescents growing up in the Chinese sociocultural context were found to have less differentiation from their parents (Wang et al., 2018b; Yu et al., 2013). While the parents in Western and Chinese societies expect and cultivate adolescents' growth of autonomy and maturity when they reach adulthood, the meanings and levels of individuation appear to be different. Many Chinese parents take care of and support their adult children physically and financially, for example, subsidize living costs, provide childcare, and pay down payment for the house (Leung & Shek, 2019). Young working adults who receive their parents' support are not viewed as incompetent and dependent. Many young families need parents' support to maintain their jobs, survive, and thrive in the increasingly difficult economic conditions. It is worth noting that Chinese adult children remain emotionally close to their parents, and there are frequent financial and emotional exchanges between family members. Differentiation may not be as easy and pathological in Chinese families pertaining to where to draw boundaries from the family of origin. Data shows that the number of extended families did not decrease in modern China as in the Western countries with industrialization and urbanization (Xu & Xia, 2014). Given this social, cultural, and economic context, Chinese adolescents set on a natural path toward independence and/or volitional functioning. It is not clear how Chinese adolescents develop their autonomy as both independence and volitional functioning therefore remain understudied by scholars, educators, and parents.

Compared with the U.S. and Western countries, autonomy has been much less studied in LAC. Indeed, most research has focused on identifying which parenting styles are the most common and their outcomes on adolescent development, adjustment, and well-being. In general, there is a consensus over the authoritarian culture that governed parent-adolescent relationships in the past. Such style, as it is known, far from promoting autonomy development, hinders it and yields negative outcomes in the personality and adjustment to the social environment. During the past decades, the authoritarian culture has been less common and is reported more in vulnerable families, in low-income socioeconomic sectors or exposed to violent social environments. In contrast, the authoritative style is increasingly common in the region (e.g., Bush & Peterson, 2014, in Chile; Richaud de Minzi et al., 2014, in Argentina; Vargas Rubilar, 2011; Schvaneveldt, 2014, in Ecuador; Solís-Cámara et al., 2014, in Mexico). In line with Western literature, the authoritative style is the one that most favors the development of autonomy and yields the most positive outcomes in other areas, while the indulgent style, although less common, has been found to produce equal or better outcomes in adolescents, including autonomy promotion (e.g., Martínez & García, 2008; Martínez et al., 2014, in Brazil; Richaud de Minzi et al., 2014; and Villalobos et al., 2004, in Mexico).

Other than these three parenting styles, the traditional style proposed by Baumrind (1996) is also less known and used by LAC researchers, although it likely has been the most prevalent parenting style. Indeed, several research findings show that parental practices of strict control coexist with high doses of support and affection, which are akin to this style. Research emphasizes that such parental control is frequently perceived by adolescents as a sign of concern and care. It responds to the affiliative culture and close interpersonal relationships and kin networks that characterize LAC countries. However, there are other studies that analyze the associations between autonomy and other specific variables, rather than parenting styles, such as academic performance, aggressiveness and violence, well-being (e.g., Cordero-López & Calventus-Salvador, 2022, in Chile), mental health (e.g., Andrade et al., 2012, in Mexico), or the increasing demands of adolescents for greater autonomy in romantic relationships choices (e.g., Del Río et al., 2004, in Colombia).

In addition to studying the issues noted above, another group of studies addresses in greater details adolescent autonomy development. Most of these studies are targeting Latino population or population with Latino background, living in the United States, and are written in English. As these are conducted in the United States, these studies follow Western theoretical and methodological guidelines and provide much more information and findings. Parental promotion, parents and adolescents' expectations, their discrepancies regarding the ages at which autonomy should be developed, and gender differences are studied. These studies focus specifically on how adolescents develop their decision-making process and the role of their parents in the process. They also grasp autonomy features primarily as independence and to a lesser extent as volitional autonomy. For instance, compared to European Americans, Latino parents expect their children's autonomy at later ages, while adolescents themselves expect to become independent at earlier ages. Girls are granted less autonomy than boys and are expected to develop it at later ages. These discrepancies are also found to be associated with high incidences of depression and low self-esteem. However, Latino adolescents and parents nurture, for instance, sharing when making decisions about school choices. This communication process promotes and reaffirms connectedness between parents and adolescents and the development of autonomous decisions in adolescents (Bámaca-Colbert et al., 2012; Roche et al., 2014; Sher-Censor et al., 2011).

Nevertheless, there is less research in LAC regarding adolescent autonomy development and the decision-making process. Yet, along with analyzing issues pointed out earlier, some studies in Chile, Mexico, and Brazil have identified the definitions and negotiations between parents and adolescents on the jurisdictional areas of legitimate authority in decision-making. They include both parents' and adolescents' perspectives and have found that there are discrepancies in autonomy expectations related to age and gender, whereby adolescents expect to become independent at earlier ages than parents are willing to support. Adolescents tend to agree more, particularly with their mothers, on prudential, conventional, and moral issues. However, disagreements are more common among younger adolescents who seek independence in the personal matters domain. The greater the agreement on issues in this domain, the fewer externalizing problems there will be. There are no

significant differences according to age, which indicates the changes in these societies toward greater equality, especially in families of middle and upper-middle socioeconomic status (Esteinou et al., 2020, in Mexico; Pérez et al., 2016, in Chile; Vargas et al., 2017, in Brazil).

Gender differences in both adolescents and parents regarding autonomy development and autonomy granting are also shown in LAC societies. In Mexico, male adolescents are satisfied with the autonomy granted by their parents, while females are much less satisfied. Mothers support adolescents' independent decision-making in personal matters such as clothing and choice of friends, while fathers also support friend choices and, to a lesser extent, romantic partner choices. While parents support the development of autonomy by involving adolescents in decision-making, they also promote the development of volitional functioning. Mothers allow adolescents to decide more than fathers do, based on their own criteria of what they consider right and wrong. In contrast, fathers trust in adolescents' decision-making skills more than mothers do (Esteinou et al., 2020). Thus, both parents support adolescents' moral, volitional, and independent development. Support for both dimensions of autonomy is complementary.

Parent-Adolescent Communication

We review the literature of parent-adolescent communication in relation to autonomy development to understand the parent-adolescent relational dynamics in this subfamily system and context. In Western cultural contexts, where researchers mainly study English-speaking population, common topics of parent-adolescent communication include adolescent developmental outcomes, parenting practices, family emotional climate, and parent-adolescent interactions. The way that parents interact and communicate with their children could largely impact on their developmental outcomes, as adolescent need to build various psychosocial skills to navigate life experiences (Ioffe et al., 2020). Evidence from earlier research showed that when parents and adolescents have quality and open communication, it helps to reduce the likelihood of adolescents experiencing internalizing problems, such as depression and anxiety (Ioffe et al., 2020).

Family emotional climate and reciprocal processes between parents and adolescents were paid close attention by scholars in studies focusing on English population. Specifically, they emphasized reciprocal links and mutual communicational bonds between parents and adolescents and family climates for communication related with autonomy in the household (Kapetanovic & Boson, 2020; Kapetanovic & Skoog, 2021; Seiffge-Krenke & Pakalniskiene, 2011). Examples include studies of exploring how comfort parents are to start a sensitive conversation with their adolescents and of studying how parent-child relationship and communications affect parental well-being (Cingel et al., 2021; De Rooij & Gravesteyn, 2018). Kapetanovic and Skoog (2021) also researched how family emotional climate could impact on the associations between parent-youth communication and adolescent

psychological functioning. It showed that parenting practices would contribute to youth psychological development when the family emotional climate is positive, and the family climate could be a protective factor for psychosocial functioning of adolescents with emotional problems (Kapetanovic & Skoog, 2021).

In addition to daily conversations and interactions, many studies in English also explored the parent-youth communication regarding specific topics that related to adolescent developmental outcomes, including smoking, drug use, and sex communication (Harakeh et al., 2010; Hurst et al., 2022). These parent-adolescent communications usually refer to a series of information exchanges that are about sexual values, beliefs, education, as well as knowledge often transmitted from parents to adolescents (De Looze et al., 2015). For instance, Hurst et al. (2022) applied the family communication pattern theory to investigate adolescent's decision-making over sexual activities and opinions through parent-adolescent communication. Their findings emphasized the significance of general communication (e.g., daily conversations with topics beyond sexual communication) between parents and adolescents. Compared with parent-adolescent sexual communication, the general conversation process could affect adolescent sexual self-efficacy even more (Hurst et al., 2022).

As an interaction of exchanging information and negotiating, parent-adolescent communication often plays a great role in shaping the development of adolescent autonomy. It often involves with decision-making process. Family decision-making refers to family members solving problems within a shared system of information and knowledge. Boundary setting and role expectations were operated through interpersonal interactions during this process. Many studies explored parent-adolescent communication and dynamic interactions by focusing on their problem-solving situations under conflictual context. For example, Diggs et al. (2017) found significant relations between harsh parenting with passive communication and alcohol use in later emerging adulthood. Moreover, Dishion et al. (2012) investigated the role of parent-adolescent communication by recording videotapes of family problem-solving tasks and found a weak but significant correlation between low-entropy and peaceful resolutions in the family and adolescent antisocial behavior later. However, early research studied adolescent decision-making as a part of individual development, and few scholars examine this within the family contact. Xia et al. (2004) examined adolescent involvement in family decision-making processes as an indicator of autonomy granting and its association with the patterns of parent-adolescent communication. Further studies need to understand adolescent development of decision-making skills within the family, specifically the dynamics of communication and relationship. We have not been researching this focus in adolescent autonomy research largely due to its complexity.

Research focusing on parent-adolescent communicational dynamics is understudied in China, yet it needs to be situated in Chinese societal context (Bi et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2017). Filial piety, as a well-known characteristic in Chinese traditional culture, has been frequently mentioned and discussed in previous studies regarding parent-adolescent relationships (Li et al., 2014; Sun et al., 2020). It was treated as a panacea, especially when researchers tried to explain familial

phenomena (e.g., elder care, parent-child relationship) in the Chinese population. However, the rigid family power structure, preferable social norms (e.g., respectfulness, obedience), and socioeconomic situations are other aspects that receive less attention within the field (Leung & Shek, 2019; Xu & Xia, 2014). In recent modernization and urbanization in China, many parents work in metropolitan areas, leaving children with their grandparents in the village. It is unclear how these Chinese adolescents communicate with and consult their parents on decisions as they go on daily businesses, for example, schooling, and peer and romantic relationships and whether these remote parents loosen up their expectation for children's obedience, which, in turn, influences the autonomy development in the children.

The sense of hierarchy keeps existing in the relationship between most Chinese parents and adolescents. Under most circumstances, Chinese parents have more rights to speak and decide when having conversations with their children due to the respectfulness and obedience that were largely emphasized in Chinese culture and social norms (Cingel et al., 2021; Li et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2017). Chinese parents tend to have authority and control over their children, especially in terms of decisions and choices. One of the Chinese idioms clearly described the unidirectional parent-child communication: *bu ting lao ren yan, chi kui zai yan qian* (If one ignores their old people's wise advice, they will surely suffer loss or have a tough time ahead). Therefore, studies investigating the youth autonomy in parent-adolescent communication, especially standing in the points of adolescents, have been extremely scarce and overlooked. Instead, adolescent academic performances are one of the most frequently studied youth outcome variables in Chinese studies, because of the high pressure and competition in Chinese college entrance examinations (Liang et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2017; Zhu et al., 2021). It seems that both scholars and parents paid excessive attention to adolescents' academic performance, yet parents overlooked their psychological development and well-being due to the absence of related education and information. Adolescents' position within their family structures is usually under the parents or siblings who are older than them (Gong, 2020).

Even though the in-depth introduction and thorough examination of Chinese parent-youth communicational processes have been scarce, the analysis and investigation related to Chinese adolescent development and parent-youth interactions could be mainly categorized into two themes. The first theme is the exploration of relationships among parenting styles, adolescent developmental outcomes (e.g., academic performance, depression, anxiety, subjective well-being), and adolescent self-concepts (e.g., self-esteem, self-construal), which takes up a large part in the Chinese literature related to parent-adolescent relationships (see Deng et al., 2017; Kwok & Shek, 2010; Leung & Shek, 2019; Zhang & Zhang, 2007; Zhou et al., 2017; Zhu et al., 2021). The parenting styles and adolescent outcomes were mainly measured through self-report questionnaires, while there have not been many qualitative studies. Another theme of parent-adolescent communication that has been frequently analyzed by Chinese scholars is how parental authority and psychological control impact adolescents' externalizing and internalizing behaviors (see Chen et al., 2018; Ma & Li, 2016; Lai et al., 2014; Liang et al., 2019; Shen et al., 2012;

Wang et al., 2017). It is worth noting that several clear distinctions between studies of parent-youth communication in English and in Chinese were presented. Many English studies investigated the mutual influences between parents and adolescents during their communication processes, while there are not many studies in Chinese mentioned or paid attention to the mutual effects in the family dynamics (Li et al., 2014).

As noted before, Chinese adolescents' efforts in the parent-youth communication process and decision-making occasions are rarely mentioned and have seemingly been ignored (Gong, 2020; Wu & Fang, 2006; Xu & Xia, 2014). Adolescents are seldom getting involved in the family decision process partly due to the high academic expectations and pressures and also because parents are the figures who are taking charge within a family and taking more control over the family affairs (Leung & Shek, 2020). Given the research that discusses the bidirectional connections and the parent-youth communication processes in the Chinese population has been scarce, it is very much needed to further explore the communicative dynamics between parents and adolescents through a Chinese cultural perspective. Due to the absence of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary fields (e.g., family science) and immature discipline constructions in the academia in China, scholars and researchers have adopted the Western conceptualization and almost treated them as golden rules. They used these dominant frameworks that were proposed and built according to industrialized Western countries, which did not reflect the real situation in the Chinese sociocultural context. Chinese researchers need to point out this question and raise their awareness of combining cultural perspectives when exploring adolescent and parent studies.

For the Spanish literature in LAC, on the other hand, communication is a topic addressed in many of studies reviewed. All of them emphasize its protective role, either by improving family dynamics, family emotional climate, and cohesion, by strengthening parent-child relationships, or by promoting specific outcomes for adjustment and well-being. Like studies on autonomy, communication is often analyzed in relation to parenting styles, seeking to identify its positive or negative role in the development of various adolescent developmental outcomes. In general, it has been found that a lack of communication or a negative type of communication has adverse effects on adolescents and on the parent-child relationship. Indeed, studies by Espinosa et al. (2015) in Mexico and Alfonso-Hernández et al. (2017) in Cuba have confirmed that a positive pattern of family communication is a protective, cohesive, and resilient factor when facing crises and difficult situations. In contrast, poor, negative, or problematic communication could lead to externalized and/or internalized problem behaviors. Similar to studies on autonomy, a large proportion of communication research is based on perceptions reported by adolescents, mainly through self-administered questionnaires, even though it is not until recently that more studies start to collect both perspectives from adolescents and their parents. However, there is still a little production of communication literature linked to adolescent's autonomous decision-making.

Poverty and inequality experienced by many social groups in LAC regions have created socioecological contexts of great stress and vulnerability for families. Far

from protecting and promoting the development of adolescents, it has exacerbated their problematic behaviors. These concerns have led many scholars to analyze, for instance, the role of communication in relation to violence and sexuality. Studies such as by Garcés-Pretzel et al. (2020) in Colombia have found that the quality of communication can favor the development of relational violence and aggressive behavior. Specifically, offensive communication between parents and adolescents can promote these negative outcomes. The relationship between communication and sexuality has been another important research topic, as adolescent pregnancy rates are high in LAC. Preventing measures to ensure sexual reproductive health as well as access to modern contraceptive methods and family planning are crucial concerns guiding several academic studies in this area.

Under this framework, parent-adolescent communication has been analyzed but primarily as the transmission of knowledge and information on sexuality, the quality and level of the dialogue established between them, and its effects on adolescents' sexual life. Studies by González et al. (2017) in Colombia and by Salazar et al. (2007) in Peru have found that having appropriate knowledge about sexuality on the part of parents and children plays a crucial role in the decisions adolescents make about their sexuality and contributes to breaking many taboos and misinformation that still prevail among them. Adolescents who have poor communication (i.e., knowledge and information) about sexuality with their parents tend to engage in risky sexual behaviors, and initiate relationships earlier, without protection. Other studies, such as Andrade et al. (2006) in Mexico and Salazar et al. (2007) in Peru, have also analyzed the level and quality of such communication. They found that poor quality of communication had adverse effects on adolescents' sexual lives. Likewise, sexually active Mexican adolescents had more communication about these issues with their male parents and were avoided more by their mothers, compared to those who were not sexually active. In the area of adolescent decision-making about romantic partners, Del Río et al. (2004) in Colombia have found that open communication between parents and children contribute to adolescent's autonomous decision-making.

Beyond the communication research of sexuality, other studies address the quality of communication considering the level of adolescent disclosure and parental knowledge. It is an important and interesting topic to understand the development of autonomy and connectedness. In the United States, the study by Blocklin et al. (2011) on Mexican-American families found that parents relied on different sources of knowledge (spouses, siblings, or other people outside the family), in addition to the self-disclosure of the children. Specifically, child disclosure to mothers, and fathers' support for their wives, were consistently linked to better outcomes in adolescents. On the other hand, also in the United States, Yau et al. (2009) compared the disclosure and reasons for nondisclosure of adolescents of Mexican, Chinese, and European origins about their daily activities. They found that Chinese adolescents disclosed less with their mothers about their personal or multifaceted activities than Europeans and less about their personal emotions than other youth. It is mainly because these acts were considered personal, not harmful, or because parents would not listen or understand them. Disclosure regarding prudential behavior was lower

among Mexicans than among Europeans since they were concerned that parents would not approve. It was also observed that greater closeness with parents was associated with greater disclosure in all adolescent groups and all activities.

In LAC, there are few studies on the topics mentioned above. In Chile, Darling, Cumsille, and Martinez (2007) analyzed the parent-children communication process in relation to monitoring, rules, and their effect on adolescent obedience. They found that adolescents obey more when there is agreement between parents and adolescent on certain issues. However, the relationship between agreement and autonomy is less clear, since it may reflect a mature identification and acceptance of parental values, and may also indicate less or a weak autonomy and individuation. In sum, although most studies confirm the crucial role of communication in the parent-adolescent relationship, its contribution to the process of adolescent autonomy and their autonomous decision-making has to be studied in greater detail in LAC and in Chinese societies.

Cultural Blind Spots and Biases

During our reviewing processes on English, Chinese, and Spanish literature about adolescent autonomy development and parent-child communication, we identified two cultural blind spots. The first blind spot relates to the language in which the studies are written and their accessibility. There is a plethora of non-English articles that English-speaking scholars may overlook or ignore, and vice versa with Spanish- or Chinese-speaking scholars. We hope with Google Translation and other translation apps, researchers make intentional and inclusive efforts to understand scholarly work done in languages different from their own, whether or not they conduct international research. Secondly, we observed that the non-English-speaking scholars tend to embrace the Western theoretical propositions. They conceptualize their research, methodological guidelines, and hypothesis under those grounds, without examining possible cultural biases and combining the sociocultural contexts. Indeed, scholars have made remarkable efforts to grasp the different sociocultural experiences, yet the overall understanding has been affected by the mainstream and research climate in the field, which further exacerbates biases by not questioning and analyzing the unfitness embedded in Western theoretical propositions. For instance, many researchers have made efforts to address cultural fit, i.e., outcome relevance in their studies by checking cultural equivalence in measurement. Even though some studies include certain social, economic, and cultural variables to provide a contextualized view, most of them do not address a substantial area of inquiry to account for the socioecological context that influences autonomy development and parent-adolescent communication. This results from a specific Western perspective of developmental psychology, which emphasizes universal principles governing personality and behavior development. Under this perspective, some

contextual variables may ponder results, but the principles remain being the same in all societies. Scholars assume autonomy development would follow the same principles in all societies, although with some variations, and Western conceptualization of autonomy would serve as the parameter to measure all the rest of non-Western experiences. As a result, the socioecological context becomes secondary or accessory; it could even be dispensed with.

To address this gap, some Chinese and LAC studies on adolescent autonomy development and the parent-adolescent communication have taken a different approach. They aim to solve this deficit by complementing the analysis and capturing the sociocultural variations among societies. This approach could be traced back to two sociocultural constructs: individualism and collectivism (I-C) (Oyserman et al., 2002; Triandis, 1995). It would shape parenting practices and strategies differently, as well as the adolescent development goals expected for each construct. Under this perspective, individualism promotes autonomy, for example, through the promotion of values of personal choice, intrinsic motivation, self-esteem, and self-maximization. Collectivism, instead, has been associated with the development of interdependence, developed through the promotion of values of connectedness to the family, orientation to the larger group, group harmony, respect, and obedience to authority figures in the family (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008; Triandis, 1995).

Adolescent autonomy has been prioritized in Western cultural settings where individualism is promoted and valued, while in other societies – such as China and LAC of which it is associated with collectivism – adolescent autonomy is promoted to a lesser extent. Although the processes of modernization and globalization have favored individualistic values and behavioral patterns, the notion that these societies are primarily collectivistic prevails. Western researchers have long theorized and debated the traits and multidimensionality of autonomy. However, the application of concepts, such as interdependence and independence, linked to the definition of autonomy, to non-Western cultures and in cross-cultural research has been problematic (Kagitcibasi, 2013). For example, most of the Chinese and LAC literature that uses the I-C as a conceptual framework is based on the proposals of Triandis (1995), Hofstede (1980), and Schwartz (1990). They classify their societies as collectivist based on the fundamental role of the family and the prevalence of an affiliative culture with close interpersonal relationships. However, having these fundamental characteristics should not automatically lead to the conclusion that such societies are collectivist. Likewise, among the features of the parent-adolescent relationship aligned to collectivist societies, many authors highlight the rigid hierarchy that structures family relationships, the controlling behavior of parents, the obedience of children toward their parents, and the limited and problematic communication between parents and adolescents. But, above all, there is an underlying notion that within this framework of relationships, autonomy, and especially individual agency and volitional autonomy, cannot fully develop. These aspects are always perceived as deficient due to the influences of family hierarchy and parental controlling behaviors. Therefore, the collectivist features of parent-adolescent relationships are in opposition to, and even may deny, autonomy.

The I-C approach has shown many shortcomings to understand the development of autonomy in its dimension of independence and volitional functioning in non-Western societies, including China and LAC. Wong, Wang, and Kan (2018), Fiske (2002), and Oyserman et al. (2002) have questioned the illusory internal coherence of I-C meanings, the lack of conceptual clarity, the porous boundaries between the two, and the multiple controversies over what falls within its purview. For example, the distinction between groups with which values, identity, and a deep sense of duty are shared (ingroups) and those with which they are not (outgroups) varies and is contradictory among different authors. Hofstede (1980) includes the family as an ingroup of individualism, while Triandis (1995) includes it in collectivism. Further, there are significant methodological inconsistencies in the instruments and indicators used, as several refer only tangentially to I-C core characteristics or measure their consequences rather than their defining elements. This suggests that cross-cultural differences depend largely on how they are measured (Wong et al., 2018). Another example would be competition or direct communication, which are classified as part of individualism but may be motivated by or serve either personal interests or social concerns, such as family cohesion. In sum, as Wong et al. (2018) have posited, many of the differences analyzed under this approach are small and inconsistent, go in the wrong direction, or depend heavily on the cultural components included in the measurement instruments. Rather than establishing meaningful differences, such labels may reify and exaggerate differences between cultural groups (p. 258).

Despite these limitations, much research about autonomy and parent-adolescent communication in LAC and China do not describe the specific collectivistic core elements that may promote independence or individuation as well as volitional autonomy. That is, a detailed analysis of how adolescents develop is missing. We have seen in the autonomy findings that parental control in China and LAC often is perceived by adolescents as a sign of concern and care within their affiliative culture and of close relationships. However, the distinction between when parental control is oppressive and endangers individuation, and when it nurtures interdependence, connectivity, or emotional closeness with parents, is not clear and must be addressed clearly.

Another example that requires further clarification and research is related to the distinction between adolescent agreement, reflecting a mature identification and acceptance of parental values. It also explores cases where agreement may indicate less or weak individuation in the negotiation process of parent-adolescent communication. This is a crucial issue since LAC and Chinese societies have placed a high value on adolescent's conformity and obedience. The limitations and examples pointed out so far represent two important cultural blind spots and biases. We suggest that a fine-tuned conceptualization and research about autonomy as independence and volitional functioning are much needed, especially given individuation and an affiliative culture can be complementary (Esteinou et al., 2020).

Final Remarks

The critical review in three different languages and cultures has contributed to the understanding of autonomy development and parent-adolescent communication from a global perspective. Our approach is still partial due to the insufficient access to the available studies in various languages, but it is the first purposeful attempt to critically analyze research findings of autonomy and parent-adolescent communication in three different languages and cultures. We have observed the universal and unique adolescent experiences across different socioecological environments, and reflected upon the cultural blind spots and biases in conceptualization of studying adolescents and their families in non-Western contexts. Two future research directions may further advance the knowledge of adolescent development of autonomy and independence:

First, the families of all countries/regions analyzed expected autonomy and independence of adolescents transitioning to young adults, but the meaning of autonomy and the process of achieving it vary across different socioecological contexts. Chinese and LAC families do not necessarily view individuation and separation from their parents and families of origin as a developmental benchmark for autonomy development, as is valued so by most Western families. Instead, Chinese and LAC parents consider their children growing up when they take greater responsibilities for their families, regardless of living independently. As mainstream American culture emphasizes on physical and emotional separation, it is stigmatizing when adult children stay or move back to stay with parents for no wrongdoing they are blamed for. Both Chinese and LAC families show parental control and enjoy constant financial and emotional exchanges with adult children, which may be interpreted pathologically as insufficient differentiation within the family and lack of autonomy. Future research is needed to examine how families in different cultural and socioeconomic contexts, e.g., hierarchy and control, provide an environment conducive to the development of adolescent autonomy, in terms of independence, volitional autonomy, and connection to parents, as our findings shed little light on any specific process and within-cultural variations.

Second, given the cultural blind spots and biases in current research resulted from adopting the current theories, we highly encourage that international researchers evaluate any theories originated in a different culture before adopting them. Cultural relevance checking should move beyond measurement equivalency and assess the applicability of current theories by analyzing the difference and similarities in the socioecological context when they conceptualize studies. Conceptualizations emphasizing universal principles or differences in terms of I-C should be regarded cautiously, especially when applied to non-Western contexts. Instead, multidimensional autonomy in forms and meanings expressed as independence and volitional functioning offers flexibility for analyzing different contexts.

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Chapter 14

Family Structure, Adolescent Identities, and the Crisis (Dilemma) of Transition into Early Adulthood in Kenya



Lucy Kathuri-Ogola and Joan Kabaria-Muriithi

Overview

One of the most significant developmental stages of a person is adolescence, which commences with the onset of puberty at around 12 years ending in the mid-20 s with a transition into early adulthood. Degner (2006) recognizes that a common understanding of the term adolescence is a stage in life where childhood ends and adulthood begins. The trajectory into early adulthood involves a profound amount of change in all development domains ranging from emotional, biological, psychosocial, and cognitive to which the family plays an important role in shaping. However, the unique transition of adolescents into young adults, coupled with social and environmental influences, usually hinders respective family roles, resulting in a milieu that heightens their desire for self and social identities, resulting in risky behavior involvement, thus presenting an urgent social problem in society.

This chapter entails a critical review and analysis of secondary data from empirical research and government reports on some of the social problems associated with adolescents' transition into early adulthood from an ecological perspective. The chapter focusing on teenage sexuality and pregnancies, drug and substance abuse, and juvenile delinquency also illuminates how the family structure and identities interact to shape these choices and outcomes. In order to achieve this, the chapter is guided by Greenfield's theory of social change and human development. The available data points to an unprecedented rise with a gender and regional variation amidst departure from long established socioeconomic as well as cultural milieu.

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Role of Family, Adolescents' Identity, and Transitioning into Early Adulthood

There is no standard description of the adolescents' age range in Kenya applicable across policies and laws, but there are marked community- and national-level disparities in defining an adolescent. In this chapter, however, we adopt Leopord (2018) and Ledford (2018) representation of 10–24 years. While this remains a dynamic concept, it is both culturally and historically rooted with its progression differing widely across cultures (Steinberg, 2014).

Across the globe and particularly in developing countries, young people make majority of the growing population (United Nations, 2015). The population of adolescents transitioning into early adulthood is projected to increase by 7% in 2030 to nearly 1.3 billion. The report by UNDP (2006) indicates that 18% of the world's population makes the young population with 85% originating from developing countries. As attention shifts toward adolescents globally, Kenya, for instance, where 22% of the population comprises adolescents (10–19 years), has experienced increased engagement and mobilization of multi-sectoral actors around the adolescent agenda. However, intrinsically linked with the transitioning into early adulthood, adolescents are socially constructed and have more to do with behavior and status than with age. The family structure is therefore crucial in helping adolescents establish their identities and cope with dilemma that comes with transitioning into young adults.

According to Daly et al. (2015), family support is universally oriented toward children's best interests and well-being, enhancing functional relationships and resource flow within the family unit. Nevertheless, the role of family structure differs across cultural contexts with regard to adolescent goals and criteria for the transition to early adulthood. While most adolescents receive family support to enable them whether the difficulties associated with their transitioning into young adults, a few cases transition without the family structure experience. Successful transitioning into early adulthood is dependent on both adaptive resources like motivation, adult support, and coping skills, and core elements including socioeconomic status, intelligence quotient, and parenting quality (Greeson, 2013; Masten et al. 2004).

In the Kenyan context, Muganda conducted a study aimed at determining the role of parent-adolescent relationships and adjustment in a family unit. The study found out that the behavior of supportive parents is crucial to the development of adolescents into young adults and their self-esteem (Muganda, 2015). Acceptance of adolescents in the family and society, providing a sense of belongingness, and being warm, empathic, and sensitive are among other aspects of showing family support, without which adolescents may end up being depressed and hostile and using drugs and substances and become delinquent and aggressive. It is during this transition that the identity formation process among adolescents begins. While it is important to form a stable identity at this stage, the role confusion might manifest hence the need for family as development actors, driven by their capacity to

understand the complexity of adolescents transitioning in the broader societal context. The social change and human development theory adopted from Greenfield aims to show how changes in sociodemographic ecologies transform cultural values and social environments among adolescents, a concept reiterated by Akuma (2015) and Theo and Lotte (2017).

A growing body of literature has in the past documented the importance of family structures as well as living arrangements on the development of adolescents. Majority of the studies, especially those conducted in Africa, have linked lack of or low family contact with the young to the increasing rates of sexual activities (Kabiru & Ezeh, 2007; Sidzem et al., 2015), increased high risk of pregnancies (Ngom et al., 2003; Vundule et al., 2001), early marriage in girls (Beegle & Krutikova, 2008), and drug and substance use (Jumbe et al., 2021).

Whereas family is considered a fundamental element in the development of adolescents into adulthood provides a platform upon which individual needs and social structure requisites are confronted, this in the modern society is tardily being replaced by peer and mass media influence. The Internet has partially replaced the traditional “adult socialization” by “self-socialization” with most adolescents seeking self-identity and recognition through their development to early adulthood. A case averred by Anderson and McCabe (2012) indicates that identity development and self-socialization in the adolescents’ social space are fraught with “risky behaviors” including sexual activities (Peter & Valkenburg, 2008), violence, as well as substance and drug abuse (Slatter & Hayes, 2010).

Across the globe, popular studies and the media have often attributed high rates of sexual activity, alcohol, drug and substance abuse, and teenage pregnancy among adolescents to “family inabilities,” citing lack of parent-adolescent interaction and high levels of conflicts with the family structure. The studies indicate that the bond between children and their families has been disrupted leading to severe cognitive, physical, and behavioral concerns among adolescents transitioning into early adulthood (Härkönen et al., 2017; Kabiru et al., 2014; Okigbo et al., 2015; Stevens et al., 2021).

While in most Kenyan communities there existed a common body of knowledge and morality that was passed down from one generation to another, rapid acculturation of modernity and social changes have radically ruptured with parents now believing that today’s norms are not worth passing on to the young society members. This is supported by Greenfield’s theory of social and human development which explains that with changes in sociodemographic conditions, cultural values and developmental patterns shift across generations (Greenfield, 2009). Bray and Dawes (2016) thus propose an ecological model situating family support among adolescents representative in South and East Africa to which Kenya is part (see Fig. 14.1).

Figure 14.1 identifies a range of potential influences on what may be considered “family structure and parenting” showing interactivity in various settings and moments in time for adolescents. The interactions between the inner core and the green sphere in a community context illustrate family structure support and

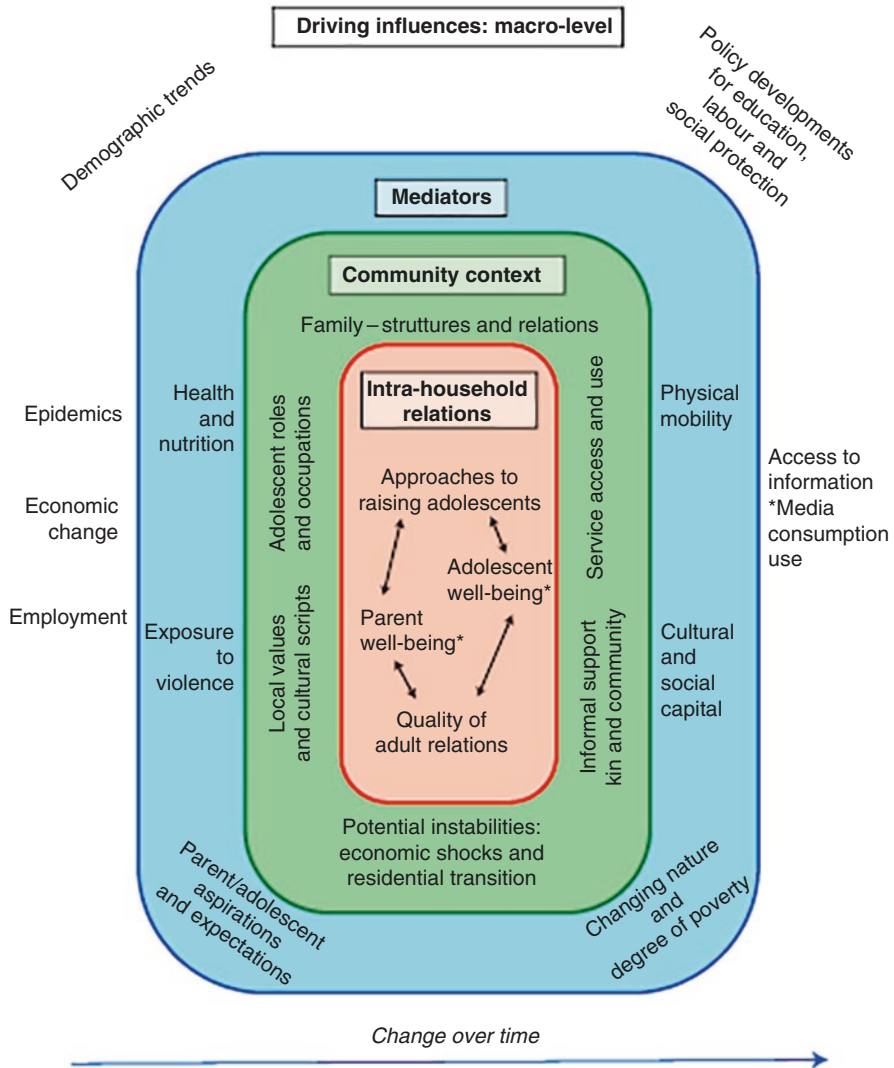


Fig. 14.1 An ecological model for parenting adolescents in South and East Africa. (Source: Bray & Dawes, 2016)

relations. The lower arrow depicts changes over time in the economic and sociocultural environment shaping the feasible and desirable behavior with regard to raising adolescents and young adults. More difficult to represent, but no less important, is the variation in notions of appropriate parenting related to the child’s age or life stage as locally construed. Care and communication are considered appropriate during adolescence and are unlikely to be salient, as one transitions into early adulthood (Bray & Dawes, 2016).

Teenage Sexuality and Pregnancies

Teenage Pregnancies: A Global and Regional Perspective

Erikson (1968), one of the early developers of sex education, opined that coming to terms with a new sense of sexual identity among adolescents is one major development task. Greenfield (2009) avers that such change in developmental trajectories is constant and even though recognizing oneself gender (boy or girl) can be traced right before the preschool years of a child, it is at the adolescent stage that newfound feelings of sexual interest and awareness are integrated into one's sense of identity. To this effect, sexual identity has generally been differentiated from sexual behavior with the latter being more varied than the former (Okigbo et al., 2015).

Many other countries across the globe experience high teenage pregnancies and unmarried motherhood. Studies have shown that teen pregnancies outside marriage have increased exponentially (Holness, 2014; Sychareun et al., 2018). Unmarried and adolescent motherhood is widely viewed in today's society as a serious vice leading to many challenges encountered by young mothers as they bring up their children. The rate of sexual intercourse among adolescents has increased due to the influence of technology among other ecological factors.

Adolescent motherhood is also seen in regions where families arrange their young girls' marriage for safety concerns. In Afghanistan, young girls are married off so as to protect them from kidnapping or rape, while in Sri Lanka, it is performed to prevent the adolescents' transitioning into adulthood from being recruited into terrorism or being abducted (Lemmon, 2014). In Syria, the number of child marriages has reportedly increased since the onset of the ongoing conflict. In other countries including refugee camps like Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, and Turkey, young girls were married to much older men in belief that they would not lack financial and stability protection (El Masri et al., 2013; Lemmon, 2014; Spencer, 2015).

Many of the countries with the highest rates of child marriage are fragile and conflict-affected states. Some of these countries are Niger, Central African Republic, and Chad (Lemmon, 2014). This is because the poverty ensuing from conflict can make families think that child marriage is a way of securing their daughters' futures (Lemmon, 2014; Sychareun, et al., 2018). Child marriage can also be seen as a means of alleviating the economic burden of having a daughter in the family during unstable times (Lemmon, 2014). According to Spencer (2015), adolescent marriages are also considered a way of protecting young girls from violence in times of conflict.

A study by Kassa et al. (2018) pointed out that adolescent pregnancy was on the rise with higher occurrences of adverse maternal and perinatal outcomes in developing countries. Their study comprised a review of 52 studies with 254,350 study participants considering 24 countries from West, East, North, Southern, and Central Africa. From the study findings, the overall pooled prevalence of adolescent pregnancy in Africa was 18.8% at 95% confidence level and 19.3% at 95% confidence level in the sub-Saharan African region. However, East

Africa, for which Kenya is a member, reported the highest teen pregnancy rate of 21.5% with Northern Africa having 9.2% (Kassa et al., 2018).

Teenage Pregnancies in Kenya

Transitioning from adolescence into early adulthood comes with many biological changes and affects relationships with peers, parents, and teachers with whom young adolescents interact regularly. Most of these relational changes raise identity-related concerns for young adults presenting a time of disequilibrium in their relationships with others. This development also prepares the young population in such transition for adult responsibilities and roles. However, some adolescents get early into sexual activity, and thus early pregnancies have now been widely experienced across counties in Kenya (Stevens et al., 2021).

With the high rate of adolescents transitioning into early adulthood in Kenya, teenage sexuality and pregnancy have become fundamental public concerns (Egondi et al., 2013; GoK, 2007; KNBS, 2010; Mugo et al., 2010). The country is known for high rate of maternal and child morbidity and mortality with nearly a tenth of all women giving birth being below the age of 20 years (Kassa et al., 2018). Mathewos and Mekuria (2018) also add that, overall, more than 90% of these teenage births happen in developing countries for which Kenya is part. According to the World Health Organization (2014) report, the adolescent birth rate worldwide was reported to be 49 per 1000 girls aged 15–19 years old. Data from the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey carried out by Kenya National Bureau of Statistics from May 2014 to October 2014 in partnership with the Ministry of Health, the National AIDS Control Council (NACC), the National Council for Population and Development (NCPD), and the Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) also depict one in every five girls between the ages of 15 and 19 years being either pregnant or already in motherhood (KNBS, 2015). The latest statistics from Save the Children (2019) show that as of 2019, Kenya reported the third highest teen pregnancy rate with 82 births per 1000 births. More so, the United Nations Population Fund Report was clear that at least 378, 397 adolescent and teenage pregnancies had been reported in Kenya in 1 year ranging from July 2016 and June 2017, with 28,932 girls aged 10–14 years and 349,465 girls aged 15–19 years becoming pregnant (Geets, 2021).

Drivers of Teenage Pregnancies in Kenya

According to the 2022 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS) report, 15% of women age 15–19 have ever been pregnant, 12% have had a live birth, 1% have had a pregnancy loss, and 3% are currently pregnant. Kenya has a draft National Plan of Action (NPA) on Adolescents and Teenage Pregnancy to guide the implementation of adolescent and health programs for the next 5 years from 2022 to

2027 in a multi-sectoral approach. Notably, adolescents should receive timely and accurate knowledge and skills about sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) to attain sexual health and prevent adverse health effects. Sidze et al. (2017) aver that there is support for sexuality education from the Kenyan government but education sector policies have largely promoted an abstinence-only approach, which has resulted in a lack of comprehensiveness in the range of topics offered in the curricula. Teenage pregnancy is driven by a number of factors including but not limited to lack of education including education on sexual and reproductive health, poverty, early sexual initiation, harmful cultural practices such as child marriages, sexual abuse/violence, and barriers to access to sexual and reproductive health services (GoK, 2016).

Besides, formal education curriculum, radio, television, and social media have also become sources of sexual and reproductive health information. However, these forms of sex education tools are however limited to those who can afford such means leaving 26.7% of the country's young population out (Omweno, 2013). Moreover, since there is no regulation of information conveyed through these "informal" sources, the authenticity of the information may not always be guaranteed.

Nevertheless, even with the availability of SRHR information to adolescents, their involvement in sexual activity and teenage pregnancy remains a major social ill in Kenya. Kenya's fertility data indicates that the total fertility rate increases from age 15 and peaks at 24 years before it starts declining. According to the study conducted by Kassa et al. (2018), the major factor that has largely contributed to the high rates of sexual activity and teenage pregnancy globally is the low age for menarche. In addition, the study indicated that having been married before, being in a rural residence, lack of maternal education among adolescents, lack of father's education, lack of education of adolescents, and lack of parental guidance on sex matters were significant factors linked to teenage pregnancy.

Other studies have indicated that most young people living in high-poverty environments, including urban slums, more often involved in sexual activity much earlier with more sexual partners than their peers living in wealthier households (Kabiru et al., 2010; Zulu et al., 2002). For instance, with the onset of droughts across some regions in the country, having left most families without livestock and low on food supplies, many families decide to marry off their daughters at an earlier age to secure their bride price which is considered a significant source of income. A study by Kimemia and Mugambi (2016) conducted among secondary school students came to the conclusion that adolescent pregnancy among secondary school students in Imenti North Subcounty was influenced by social media. A report drawn from the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey showed that 85% of married girls aged 15–19 years in Meru County used modern contraception (with 0% unmet need) while 78% residing in Nairobi County (with 6% unmet need). The statistics in Samburu indicated that only 18% of married girls aged 15–19 years old used modern contraception (with 12% unmet need) (KNBS, 2016).

Drug and Substance Abuse

One of the major social problems encountered in the modern world among adolescents is the abuse of drugs and substances. The problem has traversed from the developed countries to the developing ones like Kenya. A large number of people have become accustomed to the use of drugs as part of leisure. However, the continued use may result in adverse effects at the individual and community level. Alcohol is the most commonly abused drug and has been responsible for approximately three million deaths globally (WHO, 2018). This is an indicator of the adversity that could befall the country if the government and relevant stakeholders do not come together to eradicate the issue. In the next section, we discuss the magnitude and drivers of drug and substance abuse in relation to the theory of social change and human development (Greenfield, 2009).

Magnitude of Drug and Substance Abuse

The National Authority for the Campaign Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (NACADA) was formed by the Kenyan Parliament in 2012 as a measure to tackle the drug and alcohol abuse problem. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, the government has recognized the need to undertake awareness and public education against the abuse of drugs. It operates as a semiautonomous state corporation working with different stakeholders with a view to creating a drug-free society. Its most recent research showed a high prevalence of drug consumption in the country where 18.2% (4.9 million) of the total population currently use at least one drug or substance (Kamenderi et al., 2020). Alcohol use is by far the highest at 12.2% (3,293,495) of the total population, while tobacco was at 8.3% (2.24 million), khat at 4.1% with over 1.1 million users, and cannabis at 1% with approximately 270,000 users (Kamenderi et al., 2020). Notably in Kenya, several policy measures have been put in place by various governmental ministries, departments, and agencies to curtail drug use and substance abuse in schools.

The findings further indicate that the majority of the users have developed some adverse disorders following the abuse of a particular drug. Young people are reportedly using the drugs from an early age as the evidence shows that schools are no longer drug-free zones. Nearly 23.4% of secondary school students have consumed alcohol in their lifetime significantly increasing the risk for addiction and drug-related disorders. The findings by Jaguga and Kwobah (2020) showed that substance use disorders in sub-Saharan Africa could increase by 130% by the year 2050. This devastating estimation emphasizes the urgency to address the issue and the need to develop effective interventions. Drug and substance use among adolescents in their transitioning stage to early adulthood could lead to other forms of immorality in society such as the increase in transmission of sexually transmitted infections, juvenile delinquency, and vehicular fatalities, among other mental health-associated issues (Bala & Kang'ethe, 2021). The increased susceptibility of

adolescents to involving in drug and substance use reduces their ability to make decisions and has long-term consequences (Bala & Kang'ethe, 2021).

A study carried out in Kibera, Nairobi County, using a sample of 87 respondents by Zipporrah et al., (2018) showed that most of the respondents were aged 13 to 24 years and were quite knowledgeable of the effect of drug and substance abuse. Despite the knowledge, the majority of them still abused drugs and substances. The study also established that most adolescents (50%) who were engaging in substance and drug abuse had completed secondary school education but were yet to gain any tertiary-level education. The implication in this case is that the young population in Kenya is largely engaging in drug and substance use, and as this becomes a global menace, the poor adolescents are more affected as they are more susceptible to drugs than the rich. Drug usage is exacerbated by poverty in Kenya because people who are struggling economically frequently turn to drugs or alcohol for comfort or an escape. Lack of access to fundamental resources like education, employment opportunities, and resources makes people more vulnerable, which raises the prevalence of addiction and dependence. It is recommended that continuous creation of opportunities, awareness programs, and direct intervention measures is taken in order to address the challenge of drugs and substances abuse.

A study by Chesang (2013) established that at age 15 years, 34% of this age group had used tobacco, 18% had used cannabis sativa, and 32% had abused khat, and 5% abused cocaine in Kenya. These findings were concurrent with the national statistics from the NACADA (2017) which found out that 11.7% of young adults aged 15–24 years were users of alcohol, 6.2% used tobacco, and 4.7% abused khat, while 1.5% were users of cannabis. More so, the survey indicated that the median age of initiation into the use of tobacco products was 10 years, while the minimum was 8 years. Alarmingly, the median age for alcohol is 10 years and the minimum is 4 years. This is an indication of the serious situation faced by the youth and adolescents in Kenya who are already burdened by a variety of socioeconomic challenges (Chesang, 2013).

Causes/Drivers of Drug and Substance Abuse

It has widely been recognized that both legal and illegal drugs have become readily available with the sellers benefiting financially, particularly on the sale of drugs such as cigarettes and alcohol. In agreement, Chesang (2013), Zipporrah et al. (2018), and Oguya et al. (2021) opined that the most abused drugs and substances in Kenya are more readily available with most youths accessing the drugs as early as during their transition to early adulthood where they move from primary to secondary school. It is at this stage that teenagers often make new friends hence and become more susceptible to falling into environments where there are drugs available especially if they make wrong choices of friends. Notably after experimentation, most drug abusers will keep using the drugs to an extent of getting addicted.

Three exacerbating factors that can influence drug abuse are social approval, lack of perceived risks, and availability of drugs within the community (Oguya et al.,

2021). Alcohol remains the most common psychoactive substance used as it is easily available to anyone including minors who access them through peers (Eze et al., 2017). Although alcohol use has been part of human societies throughout history, its prevalence has increased among the youth particularly college students (Oguya et al., 2021). Other substances commonly abused in Kenya include tobacco, bhang (marijuana), glue, and miraa (khat) (NACADA, 2017). Whereas alcohol and tobacco are legally and socially approved in the society, they serve as a “gateway” to use other substances as young people begin experimenting.

Over the past two decades, there has been an unprecedented increase in drug consumption both legal and illegal. The steady increase has been observed globally with research identifying a complex interaction of social, psychological, and biological variables that influence drug and substance abuse (Nkonge, 2017). Consumption of intoxicants was a common traditional practice in Kenyan society where the male elders enjoyed a brew or herbs. However, with the breaking down of cultural values and traditional customs, all individuals now have access to alcohol and other drugs (Nkonge, 2017). Communities would set up strict traditions to control the consumption of these drugs. As mentioned in Greenfield’s theory, a movement from rural to urban regions causes a shift in developmental pathways (2009). It is for this reason that parents have abdicated their roles in raising children who will abstain from alcohol and other substances. Furthermore, the incidence of low self-esteem particularly among adolescents will likely drive them toward drug abuse (Nkonge, 2017). Other factors include peer pressure, poor academic performance, ease of access, and conflict within social groups (Nkonge, 2017). However, it is poor parenting that is highlighted as the most problematic factor that drives the youth toward alcohol and drug abuse.

Research has shown that parental involvement significantly prevents substance abuse among children, adolescents, and youth. Findings of a survey by the National Authority for the Campaign Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (NACADA) and KIPPRA on Status of Drugs and Substance Abuse Among Primary School Pupils (aged 8–20 years) in Kenya in 2019 showed that pupils from families where one or both parents/guardians use drugs or substances of abuse were more likely to use drugs or substances of abuse.

Most young people at the transition stage to adulthood are introduced to drugs and substance abuse as early as at the age of 10–14 years (Kyalo, 2010). In Kenya, this age is considered a period when one is at primary school level of education, and therefore in most cases, they lack the relevant skills to make independent decisions against the use of drugs and substances. The majority of them are influenced by their peers or persons older than them; thus, they get into abuse of drugs and substances due to their lack of knowledge. In most cases, they become addicted and unable to quit (Kyalo, 2010). At least 11.2% of the medical students in Kenya had abused drugs based on a study conducted by Simatwa et al., (2014). In their case, the most abused drugs were kuber, shisha, shashamane, heroin cocaine, and barbarian beer which were also considered to be readily available in retail shops within the school neighborhood. The reported prevalence for kuber was however higher than other drugs. The high usage of Kuber could be linked to the fact that it is not easily

noticeable when one is using it. More so, the drug does not smell and comes cheaply available in sachets that are concealable.

Pertinent Regional Differences

There is a clear difference between trends in drug abuse depending on geographical location. Individuals in rural areas are more likely to engage in alcohol and tobacco abuse, while in urban areas, individuals could go a step further to engage in controlled substances like cocaine and heroin (Musyoka et al., 2020). The study by Kasundu et al., (2012) shows that economic and cultural factors played a major role in the likelihood of youths abusing drugs. The youths in Bamburi are more likely to interact with tourists who may come with drugs like marijuana, heroin, and cocaine (Kasundu et al., 2012). The exposure to the different drugs makes it even more difficult to campaign against the social problem. This is significantly different from youths in Laikipia County who may only be exposed to illicit brew, legitimate alcohol, and tobacco (Nkonge, 2017). Therefore, demographic characteristics have a significant influence on the possibility of drug abuse, though gender has no impact. The major concern is the lack of care for rural communities that are extensively affected by illicit brews.

Juvenile Delinquency

Criminal behavior is an issue that has stifled many societies in the modern world with numerous countries being affected by increased incidences (Semise et al., 2015). In many cases, the concern arises where the practice trickles down to the younger generations. Adolescents between ages 13 and 18 years have become more prone to participating in criminal activities, a practice that psychologists refer to as juvenile delinquency. Experts in the discipline identify a crisis occurring in the transition from adolescence into early adulthood (Kariuki-Githinji, 2020; Munyo, 2013; Rezende & Estevão, 2012). The theory of social change and human development provides a better understanding of how sociodemographic ecologies alter the values and learning environments that influence developmental shifts.

In relation to the family structure, studies have indicated that the family environment overwhelmingly plays a significant role in positively influencing juvenile delinquency, both experienced as a precursor of and a buffer against misconduct among the youth (Kabiru et al., 2014). Other scholars that have similarly considered the family unit as a social institution that may lead to delinquency among youth include Gyimah et al. (2013), Gyimah et al. (2014), and Losel and Farrington (2012). This theory of social and human development is clearly highlighted through supportive, affectionate, and accepting social family backgrounds. However, this chapter only discusses a few salient characteristics of dysfunctional families.

Magnitude of Juvenile Delinquency

In the traditional society, members of the community under the guidance of clan leaders established socioeconomic and political structures that helped protect the welfare of all children. As a result, incidences of juvenile delinquency were negligible and occurred at low frequencies (Wambugu et al., 2013). However, there has been significant change over the years with the high prevalence of delinquent behavior in modern Kenya. There are more adolescents engaging in behaviors including aggressive actions, truancy, defying authority, vandalism, theft, and arson (Munyo, 2013). A recent study by UN-Habitat (2011) has shown that the majority of arrests made in Nairobi were young people caught in criminal offences from drug possession, assault, mugging, theft, and manslaughter. Kariuki-Githinji's study on delinquency in Nairobi's secondary schools revealed a high number of adolescents engaged in non-illegal and illegal delinquent activities (Kariuki-Githinji, 2020). A total of 410 students from urban secondary schools were interviewed for the research with approximately 29.3% being involved in noncompliance, 19.3% in truancy, and 16.3% in violent acts (Kariuki-Githinji, 2020). The findings also showed early onset of involvement in delinquent behaviors with the current age at 10–12 years in both boys and girls. By the age of 13–15, 4.4% of these children were involved in substance abuse, while another 5.1% were involved in theft (Kariuki-Githinji, 2020). Although involvement in illegal delinquency reduced with age, clearly, juvenile delinquency is a problem in urban Kenya.

Past studies have highlighted the problem of juvenile delinquency. Marte (2008) suggests that early childhood delinquency has the likelihood of persisting through to adolescence and early adulthood. Knowing the etiology of antisocial behavior is crucial to developing appropriate interventions to curb delinquencies (Marte, 2008). The fight against antisocial behavior lies in tracing the origin of the various forms of the behavior that affect adolescents transitioning into early adulthood. Antisocial behavior in any form leads to serious maladjustment of youth and adults if not addressed on time. It is to this end that the Geneva Convention for the Rights of the Child (2007) recommended that the United Nation's member states should develop operational interventions to curb this vice. This recommendation supports the historical social research findings which suggest that juvenile delinquency is a social problem that calls for collective effort if it is to be effectively addressed. This argument is also in line with the theory of social and human development proposed by Greenfield whose observation development pathways are shifted through ecological alteration of learning environments and cultural values (Greenfield, 2009).

Young detainees make up almost half of the total prison inmates. The statistics are worrying as a big percentage of juvenile offenders are between the ages of 14 and 18 years (Slamdien, 2010). As is globally, youths in Kenya are often charged with a range of criminal offenses from rape, robbery, assault, shoplifting, being in possession of marijuana, and posing as police officers among other vices.

Causes/Drivers of Juvenile Delinquency

In Kenyan society, various measures have been developed to tackle the issue and potentially prevent its emergence in adulthood. Remand homes, rehabilitation schools, and children's homes among other institutions are some of the interventions intended to change the behavior of delinquents. However, it is critical that policy-makers and related stakeholders identify the various drivers of juvenile delinquency to effectively curb the problem. Poverty has been identified as a primary factor in the increased number of delinquents within Kenya. According to Kinyua (2014), the juvenile justice system and the society as a whole have failed in nurturing gifted and talented children who are too curious for their parents and teachers alike. The frustration experienced leads these children to engage in rebellious behaviors and gradually progress from minor offences to illegal activities that land them in rehabilitation schools. Thuku (2017) also reported that poverty was a driving force in the incidence of juvenile crime where the caregivers lack the resources that would help support adolescent growth.

Further, lack of educational opportunities was found to be factors influencing the juvenile delinquency (Wambugu et al., 2015). The need for systemic changes is essential in the development of effective interventions to deal with the social problem. In addition, children or adolescents who experience a sense of rejection from their parents are likely to exhibit delinquent behavior. More so, the adolescent's disposition plays a role in this causal chain such that a troublesome child is more likely to be rejected by parents, which escalates the conflict that may lead to more delinquency in the child.

Adolescents brought up amidst criminal parents often have a greater likelihood of becoming delinquents as opposed to children growing up among law-abiding parents (Rezende & Estevão, 2012; Slamdien, 2010). This influence however is not to be directly related to criminality but rather to poor supervision. Positive parenting, including normative development, discipline, and monitoring, clearly determines whether adolescents will become delinquent. This is because proper supervision of the children's free time activities, their whereabouts, and peers among others is critical to assuring that children do not drift into antisocial and delinquent patterns of behavior (Munyo, 2013). The early experiences with parents and family are associated with subsequent delinquent and criminal behavior. However, not all children follow the same path to delinquency; different combinations of life experiences may produce varying delinquent behaviors.

Family Factors and Adolescence Delinquency

Positive family experiences during a juvenile's developmental period tend to deter juvenile activity and motivate juveniles who are already engaging in delinquent behavior to refrain from further delinquent behavior. Conversely, negative family experiences combine to encourage adolescents to engage in different delinquent activities. A study conducted in Kenya by Muola et al., (2009) concluded that

several factors are likely to lead children to delinquent behavior. These factors include the following:

- (i) Divorce, separation, death of one parent, and birth out of wedlock.
- (ii) Low socioeconomic status leads children into antisocial behavior due to the lack of basic necessities.
- (iii) Large families contribute to juvenile delinquency.
- (iv) Domestic violence encourages aggressive behavior among children.
- (v) The use of physical punishment as a mode of discipline encourages delinquent behavior in children.
- (vi) Gender, with boys engaging in more delinquent acts than girls.

Mwanza (2022) contends that other influential factors in the development of delinquency in juveniles include family type, family size, as well as the history of criminal or delinquent behavior.

Further, Buliva (2019) asserts that parenting style has also been found to have a relationship with delinquent behavior in adolescents. A study conducted among secondary school students in Kenya concluded that permissive parenting style had a positive and significant relationship to forms of delinquent behavior. This therefore means that as permissive parenting style increases, so do the rate and forms of delinquent behavior. In a study conducted in a youth correction and training center in Kenya, Onsando et al., (2021) posit that the parenting practices adopted by parents have a big influence on the development of delinquency among teenagers. They maintain that authoritative parenting style which is marked by warmth and care on one side and supervision and monitoring on the other is the most appropriate style that can prevent children from slipping into juvenile delinquency.

Additionally, child-rearing practices within the family setting shape adolescents' morals and behavior. This is because poor parental supervision, ineffective parental discipline, and lack of parental attachment among other parental factors have majorly contributed to the development of delinquency among juveniles. Since parents play the role of models to their children, the children reproduce or copy their parents' behavior through observation and self-reproducing of the learned behavior, noting that family relation influences the act of committing crime among juveniles. As role models, parents help adolescents involved to abstain from juvenile crime (Bakari, 2021), and their supervision and monitoring prevent their children from slipping into juvenile delinquency (Onsando et al., 2021).

Domestic violence and family conflicts also precipitate adolescent delinquency. Mwanza (2022) posits that constant family conflicts impact negatively the emotions and feelings of adolescents in the family leaving them depressed and not able to perform their duties including school activities. According to Bakari (2021), family conflicts tend to increase the risk of domestic violence and violence directed toward other people. The family conflict increases the risk of violence and crime. Since children learn through example, there is a possibility that children learn aggressive behavior by way of observing aggression in their own families and the society around them.

In summary, numerous researchers have identified the influence of family as a critical factor in the social problem. Family conflicts especially at the nuclear level will likely cause the children to rebel and engage in delinquency. In addition, the section has identified that adolescents who are rejected by their parents, grow up in homes with considerable conflict, and are inadequately supervised are hence at a greatest risk of becoming delinquents.

Pertinent Differences in Juvenile Delinquency Between Kenya and South Africa

The incidence of juvenile offending in Kenya has primarily focused on the regional differences observed by researchers. In the rural areas, the most prominent juvenile offences were theft, pickpocketing, and armed robbery. The occurrence supports that offending is a result of the poverty experienced in the areas, where in one case the focus was Majengo slums in Nyeri County (Thuku, 2017). The same cannot be said of the urban areas where studies show family attachments and family conflict have significant influences on adolescents' delinquent behavior (Mwanza et al., 2020). Research on delinquency and the risk factors has rarely touched on the gender differences or religious backgrounds of the offenders. Nevertheless, each child takes different routes toward involvement in criminal behavior, and all cannot be the same (Greenfield, 2009). Experts agree that the government has failed in its efforts to curb the incidence of juvenile delinquency and current policies are ineffective in protecting the welfare of children.

This line of research in African countries is very limited. One study in New Crossroads Township in South Africa by Ramphele (2002) shows political violence has negatively affected the morality of black youth across the country. Most teenagers as reported in the study perceive that South Africa ignores them as an entity. Additionally, the adolescent population in Africa is a majority hence the highest and most vulnerable population to engaging in juvenile delinquency.

Conclusion

The World Health Organization clearly recognizes that "adolescence" is a phase rather than a fixed time period in an individual's life through which one transitions into early adulthood. As highlighted in this chapter, it is a phase of development in many spheres from the presentation of secondary sex characteristics to sexual and reproductive maturity, the development of mental processes and early adulthood identity, and the transition from total socioeconomic and emotional dependence to relative independence.

Overall, nearly a fifth of adolescents in Africa become pregnant driven by various factors such as residence of the person, educational status, marital status, as well as mother and father's education. Thus, interventions that target these factors

are important in reducing adolescent pregnancy among youths in Kenya and other African countries. An understanding of the determinants of drug and substance use and delinquency among adolescents is essential for its prevention and treatment as enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG3). Effectively tackling substance use among young people in Africa requires more research on the complexities of unconventional determining factors for substance use. Juvenile delinquency is a serious social problem that requires urgent attention in Kenya. Evidence has shown that delinquent offending is on the rise hence the need for the society to employ effective measures to address the problem. For effective prevention and intervention, it should start as early as the age of 10 years. In the changing socioeconomic conditions, Kenyan families are the anchor and lifeboat for children and adolescents. Parents and caregivers of adolescent children need resources and supports from the government and all aspects of the society for adolescent healthy growth and well-being. Family life education is one effective prevention measure to educate parents about the knowledge and skills of adolescent development, stress management, conflict resolution, and building healthy relationships. Thus, family policies are much needed to support research and family life education in Kenya.

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Chapter 15

(Invisible) Foundations: How Religion and Spirituality Influence Adolescents and Families Within Cultural Contexts



Mona M. Abo-Zena and Huda Akef

Defining Religion and Spirituality and Their Import

Cultural religiosity reflects the global norm for humans to be religious, yet religion remains a neglected and influential dimension of human experience (Gebauer & Sedikides, 2021). Despite the prevalence of religion and spirituality (R/S) in the lives of children and families, researchers and practitioners may not consider these often (invisible) influences within their scholarship and its application. In addition, they may reluctantly explore R/S within the general scope of work given the marginalization of R/S within scientific communities and their stigmatization as social taboo or contentious topics given societal trends toward secularization (Smith, 2017). Relatedly, scholars and practitioners (e.g., educators, physical and mental healthcare providers, social workers) may consider their own limited training or knowledge base when addressing religious and spiritual matters, particularly considering the perceived risk of engaging with unfamiliar and sensitive topics.

Despite these concerns, many scholars and other stakeholders address issues related to religion and spirituality in a holistic, equity-based manner to support development, particularly of youth. A focus during adolescence is warranted given that widespread religious and spiritual influences intersect with other dimensions of identity and inform cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development of youth and adults across diverse contexts (Barry et al., 2022). Although featuring the experiences and meaning-making of diverse adolescents across contexts, this chapter

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takes a lifespan,¹ecologically grounded developmental perspective starting in early childhood given that early experiences inform later ones. By locating key encounter experiences and contexts, we describe a range of religious and related processes and outcomes, including conversion, religious doubt, atheism, and how everyday and transcendent experiences fuel and challenge religiosity. Drawing from global representations of religious and spiritual influences on the foundations and experiences of adolescents and families, we conclude with implications to support holistic identity development within family functioning.

Defining Key Periods and Concepts

Understanding the influences of religion and spirituality in human development includes the challenge of identifying tractable definitions of the terms substantively and how they operate functionally (King & Roeser, 2009). People conceptualize religion and spirituality in different ways, including variations in the degree to which they overlap. Historically, the psychology of religion literature considered both religion and spirituality under the construct of religion (James, 1902/1985). More recently, the constructs have been separated in the research literature (see Benson et al., 2012, and Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005). This parsing reflects a shift in beliefs and practices mostly in the United States and the West, including individuals who identify as being spiritual but not religious, suggesting a critique of institutionalized or organized religion (Fuller, 2001). Importantly, between both ends of the spectrum is a range of combinations that reflect personal, social, and theological factors, including cultural and religious worldviews that integrate religion and spirituality (Mattis et al., 2006).

While exploring the nuances of key terms of religion and spirituality is necessary for field building, this debate is not a central focus of this chapter. Even if not incorporated in existing research constructs, we seek to reflect R/S phenomena in all the ways they exist organically in order to represent the varied ways they exist in the lives of individuals, families, and global communities. Therefore, this chapter applies a working conceptualization that integrates R/S such as Hardy et al.'s (2019) organization which includes personal aspects of R/S (e.g., importance, identity, motivation, beliefs, purpose) and public aspects (e.g., service attendance, practices). Beyond quantifying R/S beliefs and practices, we consider youth's phenomenological understanding of religious and spiritual content, structures, and their functions. For example, the religious and spiritual development of children and youth may

¹While dominant scholarly perspectives of "lifespan" range linearly from the "cradle to grave" or birth to death, other worldviews include varied phases of prelife and/or afterlife and circular views of life or time that may reflect connections with Ancestors or reincarnations of body-spirit. The nature of beliefs about life and time as unrelated/related to "conventional" depictions of "lifespan" may have implications on how one lives or guides others to live.

include (but is not limited to) development of a spiritual sense, moral reasoning, religious identity, understanding of the existence of God and God concepts, relationships with the divine, experiences of transcendence, acquiring religious beliefs, learning and performing religious practices, entering religious communities, and negotiating relations between the self and others (Abo-Zena & Midgette, 2019).

Studying youth's spiritual and religious development requires an interdisciplinary, multilevel approach. From sociocultural, physiological, cognitive, and religious perspectives, adolescence is a robust period to explore R/S influences given that puberty and brain development contribute to youth's emerging capacities for transcendent thoughts and emotions, deepened and broadened social relations, and active meaning-making around their experiences, all which underpin R/S development (Good & Willoughby, 2008; Riveros & Immordino-Yang, 2021). The confluence of puberty and brain development occurs alongside R/S influences that have cascading, nuanced, and differentiated biological, psychological, and relational effects on individual adolescents within their particular family and broader community. For example, puberty marks when adolescents participate in physiologically initiated social coming-of-age religious ceremonies or ritual practices such as confirmation, *Kinaaldá*, and *bar/bat Mitzvah* (Abo-Zena & Midgette, 2019; Markstrom, 2008). More broadly, gendered and cultural messages embedded in religious norms influence how adolescents manage their bodies and behaviors (Mattis et al., 2006), including expectations regarding dress, sexual behavior, career options, and financial responsibility.

In order for scholarly or applied efforts to reflect varied influences of religion and spirituality in children and families, researchers and practitioners need religious literacy. Religious literacy fosters "the ability to recognize and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social, political and cultural life through multiple lenses" (Moore, 2015, p. 4) embedded in historical and current globalization and migration contexts that link people and societies of different faiths and cultures. Religious literacy neither promotes nor denigrates religious beliefs or practices and includes nonreligion. Alternatively, religious illiteracy leads to overlooking variations within a religion or similarities across religions by flattening perceptions, diminishing respect for diversity, and reinforcing stereotypes, which may contribute to religious extremism or intolerance.

Religious literacy helps researchers and practitioners gain rapport and support ecological validity in research with religiously diverse children and families. For example, in conducting interviews in homes, researchers and service providers should develop etiquette to respect religiously informed practices (e.g., removing shoes, accepting food, moderating physical contact) and know how to inquire about features with R/S import such as wall hangings with religious meaning or faith symbols like altars or prayer rugs (Levitt, 2007). Recognizing religious and spiritual symbols provides an important entry point to engage with families and better understand how these artifacts influence development. We now explore frameworks to represent how variations in these R/S influences inform development and relate to multiple dimensions of context.

Theoretical Grounding of Developmental-Contextual Influences

Grounded in a holistic, contextually, and developmentally sensitive approach, we prioritize a person-centered perspective within a systems-level framing. We acknowledge interrelated levels of systems, noting the interplay between distal and proximal contextual influences and their developmental implications. We draw from multiple theories to account for the complex, relational person-context interplay that includes R/S influences.

Broad Sociocultural and Structural Contexts

Incorporating cultural, developmental, and psychological perspectives (Jensen, 2012, 2015; Rogoff, 2003), relational developmental systems (RDS) highlight the multidirectional connections between multiple levels of the developing systems (Lerner et al., 2015; Overton, 2015). RDS provides a metatheory for addressing religious and spiritual development because it explores the particular fit between individuals and complex (i.e., coinciding and conflicting) cultural, religious, and social messaging. Given its transactional nature, an RDS framework is useful in considering youth's relations to doctrines, supernatural beliefs, practices, and communities associated with religious and spiritual traditions (Abo-Zena & King, 2021).

Despite its inclusiveness, an RDS framework does not specify socially stratified developmental systems. As such, understanding cultural contexts requires anchoring youth and family processes within social stratification theory emphasizing how discrimination, oppression, and segregation affect the developmental competencies of all youth, marginalizing some while privileging others (García Coll et al., 1996). An intersectional perspective accounts for how complex personal and social identities including religious affiliation, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and immigrant status intersect leading to unequal distribution of status and vulnerability (Crenshaw, 1989; Spencer, 2017).

Across stratified contexts, a phenomenological approach (i.e., taking into account an individual's perspective on a phenomenon) highlights a person's meaning-making around a particular experience (Spencer, 2017). Moving beyond deterministic approaches highlights that similar events may have varied developmental implications depending on the nuances surrounding a person's involvement. For example, focusing on the occurrence of an event or practice, such as religious fasting, may suggest a "standard" measure, which obscures variations in the experience itself and meaning-making around it. An abstracted approach may not account for the religious affiliation of the person, the parameters of the fast, and the individual's previous and current experience in fasting. More broadly, "standard" measures may not portray the degree to which particular religious fasting is promoted socially or accommodated in work and academic calendars, which informs individual and

collective spiritual attitudes about fasting and factors that affect psychological-physiological health and other issues related to fasting.

Conceptualizing Influences in Proximal Contexts

While sociocultural approaches help elucidate underexplored processes and macro-contextual influences that shape development for diverse (i.e., all) youth and families, cultural practices can be explored at the micro-contextual ecology particularly given family- and community-based variations (Super & Harkness, 1986). Ecological influences include macro-contextual factors and how they are filtered in everyday contexts, such as individual families' approaches to faith practices and interpretations of shared and diverse narratives, theologies, and histories. Importantly, youth's ecologies reflect their own interpretations and conceptualizations of R/S practices, including affective and behavioral responses to R/S influences and choices to engage in, question, or reject practices and interpretations. In a bidirectional manner, youth's behaviors also inform family approaches to religious socialization. Through intentional and sometimes unconscious strategies, caregivers seek coherently to integrate their values into particular practices within their physical and social contexts to promote developmental outcomes aligned with their R/S and broader values (Rogoff, 2003; Super & Harkness, 1986). For example, religious and cultural values inform norms for how adolescents greet others with variations in informality/formality and respect or deference given issues such as age, levels of authority, specific context, and relational proximity. Greetings feature words or phrases in particular language(s) and discourse styles, gestures such as nodding or bowing, and physical contact such as kissing on the cheek(s) or hands or shaking hands. Through modeling and explicit instruction, youth learn greeting practices and infinite other behaviors and values in family and community contexts. Filtered through media messaging and school/schooling contexts, how youth learn behaviors and internalize values and particular religious content affects their sense of personal and group belonging across a range of everyday and occasional contexts.

Religious Content as Context

Understanding the influential role of religion and spirituality on adolescents and families requires attending, at some level, to the specific content embodied in their teachings. Religious and spiritual teachings vary in promoted values (e.g., enlightenment, glorifying and worshiping God, leading an ethical life) and behaviors (e.g., prayer, meditation, pilgrimage, missionary work, alms giving, serving people in need). The beliefs and behaviors prioritized in one tradition may vary or even conflict with other faith traditions and those promoted by "mainstream" or modern society (e.g., normalizing "risky" behavior such as experimenting with

self-expression or drugs). A range of intrinsic and extrinsic factors affect whether youth adhere to or seek religious guidelines. Especially for more socially conservative religious groups, these negotiations are visible in everyday encounters, such as decisions about religious attire (e.g., kesh or uncut hair, daggar, wig, veil, kippeh). Particularly tenuous negotiations include those associated with intimate and romantic relationships, given many religious and/or cultural guidelines that forbid premarital sex. Although coupling and dating are common and often an informal rite of passage during adolescence, some religious youth or ones with religious families may face additional challenges navigating desires and pressures related to sexual intimacy prior to marriage (Regnerus & Uecker, 2010). Similarly, pursuing relationships outside an ethno-religious group or within the same sex may be construed differently. While such behaviors and exploration may be of minimal concern for some adolescents and their families, for others, the sanctions may be considerable. Familiarity with religious content contributes to religious literacy, which helps contextualize how specific R/S beliefs and practices may lead to different cultural and developmental expectations and experiences.

Religion/Spirituality Embedded in Cultural and Contextual Ecologies

Despite a surge in developmental scholarship that addresses culture, the prevailing theoretical and methodological tools of psychology were founded on ahistorical and context-eliminating perspectives that privilege research that reflects racialized reasoning and obscures the lived experiences of individuals and communities across global contexts (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). When scholars do consider culture and context, references are often reductionist or risk cultural (mis)attribution bias that overemphasizes the role of culture in minoritized samples and underemphasizes its role in White or dominant samples (Causadias et al., 2018). In considering the role of culture in religious and spiritual development, scholars have warned against equating culture with race-based proxies in order to explore how ethnicity, culture, race, and religiousness are linked (Mattis et al., 2006). Cultural values and practices exist across multiple contexts (e.g., family, neighborhood, socioeconomic, religious affiliation, and geographic) and range in the degree to which they fit or conflict with one another given their complex relation with other personal and social factors (e.g., religiousness, race, ethnicity, migration history, gender, sexual orientation). Cultural variations are deeply embedded in broader social structures, such as laws, schools, media, and congregational culture. More proximally, cultural interactions with religious and spiritual influences are intimately (and sometimes invisibly) incorporated into social relationships, including adolescents' relationships with mentors, religious leaders, peers, and their caregivers (King et al., 2017). For example, within salient R/S social relationships, adolescents learn about, travel or make pilgrimage to, or seek proximity to sacred materials, holy places, or holy missions.

In particular, we focus on the family-level interplay between a youth's development in relation to family and other environmental influences (Super & Harkness, 1986).

Family Influences and Adolescent Religion/ Spirituality Development

Families have long been considered as a main influence when considering children's R/S development, socialization, and other related outcomes. The family is considered the strongest developmental context for religious development (Hardy et al., 2022). The religious lives of parents, including differences in affiliation and levels of practice, are considered to have the most influence on the religious lives of their teenage and young adult children (Smith et al., 2020). Parenting and family variables are also commonly studied as mediators of the influence of adolescent R/S on different outcomes (Hardy et al., 2019). When considering R/S within family contexts and processes, there are a multitude of viewpoints and roles through which its development and influence can be studied. However, the research literature primarily presents outcome-oriented approaches that leave many unexplored processes. When considering our knowledge of R/S in relation to specific adolescent outcomes, "we know a lot about the 'what' in terms of 'what' outcomes R/S are linked to, but we know less about the 'who,' 'where,' 'when,' 'why,' and 'how' in terms of the processes linking R/S to such outcomes" (Hardy & King, 2019, p. 244). Researchers also tend to focus on R/S when considering matters directly related to religious development, socialization, and transmission while neglecting to consider their (invisibilized) influence on general processes related to child development and family functioning that embed religious and other forms of socialization in everyday life.

Klingenberg and Sjö (2019) review how religious socialization has been conceptualized and researched, defining it as "the process in which an individual comes to hold preferences in relation to dimensions understood as religious in the surrounding context" (p. 174). This definition allows for a contextual perspective that accounts for reciprocity and agency in religious socialization processes, as well as fluctuations in religious belief and affiliation. Developmental psychology and family science scholars have detailed processes of religious socialization within families which include symbolic references and religious meaning, observing spiritual and religious behavior models, engaging in family religious rituals and activities, and channeling children into social groups and contexts that support their religious identity (see Barry et al., 2022; Cornwall, 1988; Oman, 2013). While parents have been recognized as key agents of religious socialization, there has been limited exploration into the nuances of socialization approaches and how religion may be integrated into different aspects of their daily lives. Smith et al. (2020) present one of the few qualitative studies examining faith transmission through narratives of religious parents, based on which the authors reconstruct cultural models that

underlie parents' approaches to passing on religious faith and practices to their children. Contrary to researchers' expectations, these cultural models were relatively consistent across the somewhat diverse US sample of religious parents and their varying practices and experiences. Developing an understanding of implicit cultural models that drive parents' behaviors and practices mirrors identifying parental ethnotheories in the developmental niche framework (Super & Harkness, 1986), which we utilize to examine the forms and functions of family influences on R/S.

The Developmental Niche of Religion/Spirituality

Understanding the psychology of culture, as Harkness and Super (2012) discuss, requires looking at an individual and their culture as one unit together; they cannot be isolated. Considering individual culture entities contrasts with earlier models (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) that looked at culture as part of the macrosystem, a distant part of the nested ecologies that envelope an individual. The individual culture entity can be conceptualized through the developmental niche framework that integrates concepts from anthropology, including the inseparability of the individual from cultural contexts (Super & Harkness, 1986). Specifically, the developmental niche looks at the micro-level contextual ecology of a child's development through three major subsystems: caretaker psychology, customs and practices of care, and physical and social systems. These subsystems structure the world that the child experiences, informing their specific developmental trajectory. A thorough and contextual examination of these subsystems can uncover varied explicit, implicit, and invisibilized aspects of R/S that are present and salient in a family's everyday life. It can also indicate how religion can be intertwined within the culture that informs components of the niche. We begin by delving into caretaker psychology, which includes the beliefs that parents hold about their roles and their children's development and well-being, or parental ethnotheories.

Parental Ethnotheories

Parental ethnotheories are essential to the psychology of caretakers and represent internalized cultural models that shape parenting practices. These ethnotheories may include implicit beliefs about children's development and needs, goals parents and communities have for their children, and roles and responsibilities parents perceive toward their children. The power of ethnotheories lies not only in their direct effects on specific parenting practices but also in how they can indirectly shape children's worlds through their "directive force" within the developmental niche, where "customs and settings can be seen as instantiations of parental ethnotheories" (Harkness & Super, 2012, p. 510). Accordingly, parental ethnotheories are an important starting point in the examination of R/S in the family context, where they

can be ingrained into cultural beliefs and be an important part of a parent's worldview. When religion is an important part of parents' worldviews and ethnotheories, it may be incorporated within a multitude of behaviors and practices, rather than only appearing distinctly as deliberate religious practice or intentional acts of religious socialization. This gives rise to small acts of religious socialization through meaningful behaviors that are intertwined with seemingly mundane parenting practices, like the prayer a mother whispers when tending to her child's wound or the spiritual poem a father recites with his children during bed time. Other caregivers may engage in religious practice and socialization, helping them manage their own anxiety, by making a cross on their grandchild's back or reciting supplications while holding their grandchild's hand as they depart. Religious socialization can start as early as the choice parents make when naming their children, which often has religious and spiritual significance.

Most religious beliefs and doctrines have clear guidelines that elevate maintaining family relationships, which may induce a sense of sanctification associated with participating in family relationships. While the concept of sanctification can have varying theological meanings, scholars in psychology research have defined it "as a process through which aspects of life are perceived as having divine character and significance" (Pargament & Mahoney, 2005, p. 183). Sanctification can include how parents make meaning of their roles and their sense of duty as caregivers, as well as drawing from theological grounds when they think about goals and standards for their practices (Mahoney et al., 2003). R/S beliefs may inform parents' ethnotheories about children's development reflected in religious rites of passage marking youth transitioning into being accountable members of a religious community (e.g., confirmation, puberty, age 13, and bar/bat mitzvah). R/S factors may influence the motivations and goals caregivers set for their children, reflecting parents' religious commitments and beliefs. Research/spirituality may inform how parents construct their sense of accountability as caregivers and what they believe is "best" for their children. When parents have a sense of sanctity associated with their parental role, religion can be an important resource in defining what they emphasize in their children's socialization and how they go about it. For example, Vermeer and Van Der Ven (2006) found that Dutch religious and church-going families tend to put more emphasis on moral socialization than their secular counterparts. Volling et al. (2009) explore aspects of religion and children's conscience development in a sample of 58 American families who were mostly Protestant or Catholic and report that sanctification of parenting was associated with parents' positive socialization and relying more on reasoning and explanation than other forms of punishment when disciplining their children.

As we discuss how R/S influences the beliefs and practices of parents, we must note the wide spectrum of forms and levels of religiosity and spirituality parents and family members may adhere to. Through their extensive qualitative work with American emerging adults, Smith and Snell (2009) identify six major types of religiosity/spirituality: committed traditionalists, selective adherents, spiritually open, religiously indifferent, religiously disconnected, and irreligious. These categories may not be comprehensive, but provide an example of the varied experiences

and trajectories of R/S in the US context alone. The decline of institutional religiosity in the past decades may not translate into a general decline of religion and spirituality, but rather an increase in the variety of personalized R/S experiences and manifestations. Parents' and caregivers' specific R/S beliefs and experiences, then, can inform their ethnotheories and practices in a range of ways and to different degrees. R/S beliefs and practices interact with general parenting styles and parenting factors informing socialization processes. Integrating religious messaging and rituals with parental warmth seems to lead to more religious continuity across generations (Bengtson et al., 2013). In contrast, religious rituals in the context of harsh compliance may have the opposite effect. This context of warmth is also of importance when considering symbolic religious meaning in the form of rituals. When adults recall religious rituals from their childhood, it may be with a sense of reminiscence of meaningful interactions with their parents. For example, a parent who recites a prayer calmly when tending to a child's injury or illness combines a religious ritual with warmth that extends its impact. Ritual is both an important mechanism of religious socialization and a potential vessel for parental warmth. As illustrated, R/S can be an integral element of parents' ethnotheories that underlie their practices and religious beliefs while contributing to the larger fabric of culture and customs of child-rearing.

Customs and Practices of Care

Within the developmental niche framework, cultural customs and practices of care are ones that are widely considered as the default within a particular cultural context and do not require rationalization at the individual level. They can include common practices related to child-rearing at individual, community, or institutional levels (Super & Harkness, 1986). While customs and practices of care generally have cultural or pragmatic import, others may reflect a range of R/S influences (i.e., religious literacy helps researchers identify these meanings, as well as their sociohistorical context). For example, newborn and baby rituals help initiate infants into a circle of believers, such as male circumcision practices, shaving a baby's head (based on Hindu traditions), or reciting the *adhan* (Muslim call to prayer) in a newborn's ear (Alrashidi & Alanezi, 2020). More broadly, R/S informs fundamental stances regarding issues such as abortion and birth control through related beliefs about the nature of life and the endowment of a soul. R/S can also be deeply intertwined with culture and language, where many normative expressions of celebration, greeting, and condolences are imprinted with religious meaning, with potentially profound cumulative socialization effects. For example, the Spanish *adios* references a return to God, and *ojalá* has origins in the Arabic *in shaa Allah* (if Allah wills). Different dialects of Arabic are rife with what Morrow and Castleton (2007) term the *Allah lexicon*; a wide range of religious phrases integrated into the language. More broadly, storying and storytelling provide opportunities for religious transmission, religious meaning-making, and individual, family, and ethno-religious identity building (Schwab, 2013).

R/S-related practices and behaviors may also be regulated by customs of the larger cultural or regional context. For example, within the same religion, religious practices reflect different manifestations across countries or cultural contexts. An Egyptian Muslim tourist may be surprised at the speed of daily prayer at a mosque in Turkey, or how most women seem to bring separate colorful prayer clothes with them to a mosque in Indonesia. This integration and compatibility of R/S across cultures is part of the flexibility that allows continuation and adaptation of R/S influences across generations and sociocultural contexts. Consider the case of Catholicism and its integration with varying ethnic identities (Irish, Italian, Latine), the history of Islamic jurisprudence being informed by local customs to produce cultural variations in rulings and practices, and cultural and theological within-group variations under the umbrella of Judaism. Cultural customs and R/S have been woven together throughout history to produce distinct identities and experiences.

Given these intersectional variations, researchers and stakeholders should be cautioned regarding implicit assumptions of cultural homogeneity when considering cultural customs and practices of care related to R/S. Variations in customs can be more easily identified through cross-cultural perspectives even when considering purportedly “homogenous” communities (Harkness & Super, 2012; Rogoff, 2003). In an increasingly globalized world, where people may be in physical and/or virtual proximity, varied customs and practices of care rooted in different cultural, ethnic, and religious identities are still discernible. To study such customs and related R/S in families, one must then consider the customs rooted in their identities and histories, as well as how the family fits within the larger sociocultural context. When a family’s R/S or other identities do not align with those in the mainstream culture in which they live, they may find themselves negotiating customs they grew up with and customs of their new environment while trying to disentangle their religious beliefs and knowledge from associated cultural practices. Immigrant families navigating acculturative stressors may seek to protect and preserve their R/S beliefs and practices through more intentional socialization practices with their children (Smith & Adamczyk, 2021). Although their specific religion may not be well represented in the environment in which they live, R/S attributes may become a more salient part of their identity. Alternatively, poor person-context fit may contribute to religious doubt, questioning, interfaith exploration, or conversion (Abo-Zena & Rana, 2015). For adolescents and emerging adults exploring and grappling with their identities, R/S may accordingly become an important aspect of their experience, particularly when it sets them apart from their peers. In a qualitative study of Indian-American Hindu and Muslim emerging adults, participants described entry into college as an important beginning of self and religious discovery (Levitt et al., 2011). Prior to being in the diverse college setting, many participants had difficulty distinguishing religious practices from their ethnic cultural practices. However, exposure to other observant religious groups or nonreligious cultural groups allowed them to decouple religion and culture. Culture itself can serve as a *de facto* “religion,” where cultural practices are codified, even though they may not be grounded in the religion (e.g., henna parties as part of South Asian Muslim marriage traditions). Some emerging adults who observed the influence of culture on religion in ways that were

not theologically grounded have sought to purge cultural innovations from religion in order to return to a “pure” form of religious practice (Levitt et al., 2011). In other cases, experiencing contradictions between proclaimed R/S values and observed behaviors can trigger a disconnect between children and their parents or community. This can be as simple as children or youth becoming less interested when they observe their parents not practicing what they preach (e.g., see Smith & Adamczyk, 2021) or a generation of religious youth reacting to sociopolitical events turmoil within religious communities by forging their own paths (e.g., see Amin, 2021). Encountering R/S contradictions, hypocrisy, and phoniness can represent an encounter experience that leads to youth disaffiliation from a particular religious affiliation or religion altogether, while other adolescents may search to reconcile what R/S means to them (Pearce & Denton, 2011).

Physical and Social Spaces

The third subsystem of the developmental niche is the physical and social settings that make up children’s environments. Children’s development is influenced by the direct settings in which they live and the daily social interactions that happen within those settings. This influence occurs through the different structures of opportunity provided for the development of potential behaviors (Super & Harkness, 1986). Families may promote R/S through intentionally using their physical space, decorating walls at a home with a cross or religious scripture, or dedicating space to prayer or meditation. The social systems in which youth grow up may be organized around religious beliefs, events, and rituals. Marked occasions throughout the year (e.g., Christmas, Ramadan, Yom Kippur, Diwali) may or may not correspond with national holidays. Relatedly, beliefs may manifest in how the day is organized around prayer times or how the week is organized around religious observances (e.g., Shabbat, Jumaa/Friday prayer). Symbols of R/S are present in what children see (e.g., churches/mosques/temples, religious statues, people’s attire and behavior) and what they hear (e.g., church bells, adhan/call to prayer, religious messaging in media or embedded in everyday language).

The organization of children’s physical and social world can be passively shaped by the larger sociocultural context in which they live or through the influence of parental ethnotheories informed by R/S reflected in how parents organize space and time within their own household. Curating elements of R/S in children’s physical and social spaces may be part of a parent’s approach for subtle religious socialization. Smith and Adamczyk (2021) report that a majority of parents in their study attempt to pass religion on to their children at least in part through “osmosis,” where religion is cultivated in children in more subtle ways. Parents can also make intentional efforts to expose their children to specific religious environments and communities beyond their own household (e.g., joining a religious youth group, religious camp or retreat, interfaith event), a mechanism of religious socialization that scholars have described as “channeling” (Cornwall, 1988; Martin et al., 2003). Decisions about where to live may also be influenced by proximity to a religious place of

worship that a family frequents or to a community or school that can support parents' goals of religious education for their children. Parental ethnotheories, religious values, and customs of care often converge across religious traditions to support sustaining and preserving nature and place given the centrality of environmental stewardship shared by many faith traditions (Szrot, 2021).

Conclusions Regarding Varied Youth Processes, Outcomes, and Implications

The omission of an appropriately diverse, complex, and holistic treatment of R/S in the lives of children and families limits researchers and practitioners' ability to develop interventions that address the child and family unit comprehensively and contextually. Toward addressing this gap, this chapter explores how R/S informs the development of youth from an intersectional perspective and within family contexts. Families themselves are nested within cultural and sociopolitical ecologies and reflect on ethnic, racial, gender, socioeconomic, and other variations. Given the diversity of R/S beliefs and traditions, scholars and practitioners need to develop religious literacy to identify the sometimes invisible or deeply embedded R/S anchors of beliefs and behaviors that guide the range of youth experiences and their development.

While focused on the experiences and meaning-making of diverse adolescents across contexts, we assume a lifespan, ecologically grounded developmental perspective starting in early childhood and including the reciprocal relations with adults who are integral to youth's social ecology. With a particular focus on R/S influences on family life across cultural contexts, we consider the reciprocal, interactional, and sometimes contradictory relationship between internalized and externalized customs and R/S beliefs and practices that youth and adults experience fluidly. We incorporate broad cultural and developmental psychology with relational developmental systems (RDS) to highlight the multidirectional connections between multiple levels of the developing systems that include how R/S affects the particular fit between individuals and complex cultures. To better understand how broad and stratified social contexts affect individual youth development, we draw from a phenomenological approach that highlights a person's meaning-making around a particular experience. To better capture R/S influences and youth development within family contexts across cultures, we focus on how the developmental niche examines the micro-level contextual ecology of a child's development through the three major subsystems of caretaker psychology, customs and practices of care, and physical and social systems.

Integrating broad cultural and structural analysis with a closer examination of developmental processes and outcomes at individual and family levels provides multiple lenses that frame youth development. Moving toward future work to understand R/S influences on youth development, to account for person-centered

variations, Schachter and Hur (2019) recommend that idiographic (unique to a specific faith tradition or a particular child) and nomothetic (pancultural) are useful approaches to guide our understanding of the role of religion and religious socialization agents on identity. To better understand regularities and variations and the fluid nature of R/S development of youth within and across cultural contexts, we need to support longitudinal research to illustrate both person- and faith-specific experiences and pancultural trajectories (King et al., 2021). Such accounts for the dynamic and diverse nature of R/S in the life of individuals require moving beyond decontextualized studies of religious beliefs and practices. They further investigate the historically and culturally situated and intersectional nature of individuals' day-to-day experiences and understand their faith-related experiences, including R/S as sources of strength and joy within minoritized communities (Park et al., 2020). These diverse research and applied approaches can contribute to a holistic account of youth's positive development to support capturing the mosaic of traditional, collective, and individual religious/spiritual experiences and socialization goals created, assumed, and implemented in the context of youth's lives.

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Correction to: The Role of Digital Technology in Adolescent Autonomy Development: A Four-Factor Model and a Global Perspective



Xiaoran Sun

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The chapter was inadvertently published with an incorrect affiliation for the author as “College of Education and Human Sciences” whereas it should be “College of Education and Human Development.”

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