

The Role of the Family Genogram in assessment of Parent-Young person relationships, the experience from a Family Practice in South-Western Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

Background: The family a young person belongs to is of much importance in determining his/her future outcome. The parent-young person relationship was assessed using the family genogram. Factors associated with the relationship and how it affects the perceived family function of the young person were also assessed.

Method: Two hundred and twenty-one young persons, aged 15 to 24 years, had their genograms constructed as part of family-oriented interviews conducted for family assessment and diagnosis. Relationships between young persons and their parents were categorised as either very close or not very close.

Results: Respondents were more likely to be very close to their mothers than fathers 75.4% and 47.7%. First-born children were less likely to be very close to their parents than last-born children, 38.8% vs 50% with fathers and 74.2% vs 86.8% with mothers. Close relationship with either or both parents was significantly related to proper family functioning ($p=0.003$ with fathers and $p=0.021$ with mothers).

Conclusion: Parent-young person relationship was significantly related to perceived family function in the study. The Family genogram is suggested as a tool for assessing parent-young person relationships.

Keywords: Genogram, Parent-young, Family relationships

Background

A family is a group of people affiliated by consanguinity, affinity, or co-residence. It can also be described as a basic social unit consisting of parents and their children, considered a group whether dwelling together or not.¹ The family forms a very strong unit around which the society evolves. A properly functioning family will have good intra-family relationships and good parental monitoring and supervision, which prevent the association of a young person with deviant peers, a primary pathway leading to the onset and escalation of high-risk behaviour in young persons.² Young persons who live with two parents, biological, step-parents, or any combination thereof, are observed to be significantly less likely to engage in risky behaviours such as smoking, property damage, illegal drug use, or running away from home.² Families characterised by conflicts, aggression, cold relationships, poor support and neglect, place children at risk for a wide variety of emotional and behavioural problems and health risk behaviours.³ There had been links between poor parent-young person relationships and suicidal ideation and behaviour.⁴ It is therefore important to regularly assess the Parent-Young person relationship, either as

an opportunistic assessment during a visit for routine consultation or as a component of a complete family genogram when family-related challenges are presented with.

The family genogram is an important tool for family assessment, diagnosis, and therapy.⁵ It serves as a tool for detecting genetically related conditions which can be prevented in future generations, like obesity, diabetes mellitus, hypertension, and some cancers. While these functions are significant enough, the genogram can also serve as a tool for the assessment of intra-family relationships between component members of a family unit that are included in the genogram. It can expose salient family relationship challenges, providing a basis for family intervention.

Methodology

Two hundred and twenty-one young persons, aged 15 to 24 years, had their genograms constructed as part of family-oriented interviews conducted on them for family assessment and diagnosis. Family-oriented interview consists of family-oriented questions which have been found to have the ability to metaphorically bring the family into the consulting room and bring a family context to the presenting problem.⁶ It also involves the use of family genogram which has been described as the simplest and most efficient method

for understanding the family context of a patient encounter during a consultation.⁷

The study location was the Family Medicine department, Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospital, Ile Ife. Entries into the family genogram were assessed as whether the young person could describe the relationship with their parents as very close or not very close.

Family function was classified as highly functional (APGAR scores of 7–10), moderately dysfunctional (APGAR scores of 4–6), and severely dysfunctional (APGAR scores of 0–3).⁸ It was further grouped into functional (APGAR scores 7 – 10) and dysfunctional (APGAR scores 0–6)⁹

The correlates of parent-young person relationships among the respondents were identified at the bivariate level using Pearson's chi square and the moderately statistically significant factors (with $p < 0.25$) were included in a multiple logistic regression model to identify determinants of perceived family function. Correlation between the family function i.e. functional or dysfunctional and family relationship patterns from the genogram was assessed using the Pearson's chi square.

The level of statistical significance was determined at $p < 0.05$.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the OAUTHC ethics committee.

Results

The mean age of the respondents was 20.2 ± 2.6 years. The age range was between 15 years and 24 years. The male to female ratio (M: F) was 1:1.76. More of the respondents were aged 20-24 years (61.5%), and most were in socio-economic class II (44.8%), Table 1. Majority (63.8%) of respondents were from the monogamous family type, figure 1. 27.1% were first born children, while 18.6% were last born children, figure 2.

Table 1: Frequency distribution of respondents by socio-demographic characteristics

Socio- demographic characteristics	n (%)
Age in years (N=221)	
15-19	85 (38.5)
20-24	136 (61.5)
Sex (N=221)	
Male	80 (36.2)
Female	141 (63.8)
Religion (N=221)	
Christianity	189 (85.5)
Islam	32 (14.5)
Education (N=221)	
Secondary	109 (49.3)
Tertiary	112 (50.7)
Socio Economic Classification (N =219)+	

Class I	40 (18.3)
Class II	98 (44.8)
Class III	50 (22.8)
Class IV	29 (13.2)
Class V	2 (0.9)

+2 respondents were orphans and were not captured by the Oyedeji et al criteria

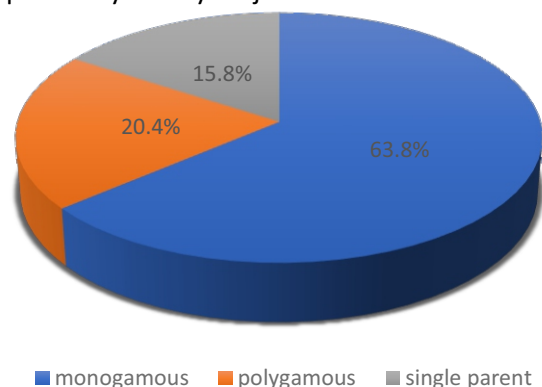


Figure 1. family type of respondents

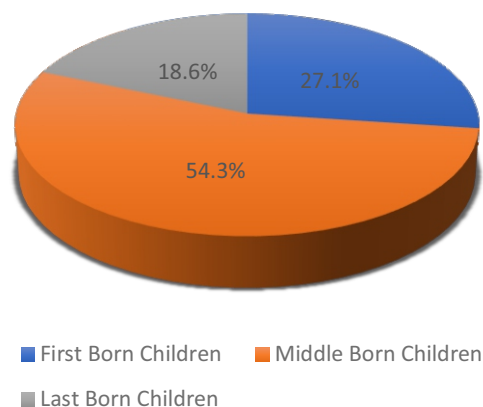


Figure 2. Birth order of respondents Parent-young person relationships

Relationship between young persons and their parents were categorised as either very close or not very close. 47.7% were very close to their fathers while 75.4% had a very close relationship with their mothers, figure 3. Of the factors associated with father-young person relationship in the study, most respondents from polygamous families were not very close to their fathers, and this finding was statistically significant, table 2. Family type was a significant determinant of father-young person relationship in this study, table 3. A higher proportion of respondents were observed to be very close to their mothers irrespective of gender, the females were however more than three times likely to be close to their mothers than the males. The finding was statistically significant, tables 4 and 5.

As regards birth order and relationship with parents, only 38.8% of first-born children were very close to their fathers while 74.2% were very close to their mothers, tables 2 and 4. Though last-born children

were observed to be very close to their parents, very close relationship with mothers was more prominent, 50% and 86.8% for fathers and mothers respectively, tables 2 and 4. These findings were however not statistically significant.

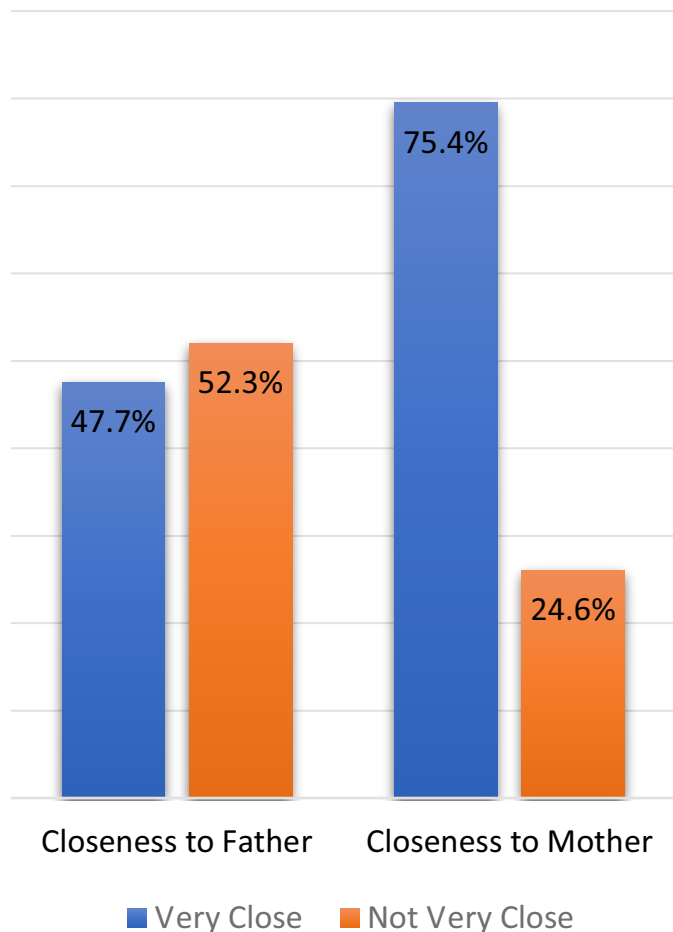


Figure 3: Pattern of parent-young person relationship

Table 2: Factors associated with father-young person relationship

Charact eristics	Closeness to Father		Statistic	
	Very close n (%)	Not very close n (%)	χ^2	p
Age				
group				
15-19	41 (53.9)	35 (46.1)	1.900	0.168
20-24	54 (43.9)	69 (56.1)		
Gender				
Male	38 (53.5)	33 (46.5)	1.479	0.224
Female	57 (44.5)	71 (55.5)		
Education				
Tertiary	45 (44.1)	57 (55.9)	1.100	0.294
Secondary	50 (51.5)	47 (48.5)		
Religion				
Christianity	83(48.5)	88 (51.5)	0.311	0.577
Islam	12 (42.9)	16 (57.1)		
Family type				
Monoga mous	74 (52.9)	66 (47.1)	4.254	0.039
Polygamo ous	15 (34.9)	28 (65.1)		
Socio econom ic class				
Higher	80 (45.5)	96 (54.5)	3.184	0.074
Lower	15 (65.2)	8 (34.8)		
First born				
First born	26 (38.8)	41 (61.2)	3.231	0.072
Not first born	69 (52.3)	63 (47.7)		
Last born				
Last born	18 (50.0)	18 (50.0)	0.900	0.764
Not last born	77 (47.2)	86 (52.8)		

b= Fisher's exact statistic, +df=1, n=number

Table 3: Multiple logistic regression models for predictors of father-young person relationship

Independent variable	Dependent variable- Relationship with father (Very close = 1; Not very close = 0)		
	Odds Ratio	95% CI for odds Ratio	significance p
Age group of respondents (ref=15-19)			
20-24	1.618	0.869 - 3.014	0.129
Sex of respondent (ref= male)			
Female	1.435	0.765 – 2.690	0.261
Socio-economic class (ref=higher class)			
Lower class	0.372	0.131 – 1.058	0.064
Family type (ref= monogamous)			
Polygamous	2.255	1.073 – 4.738	0.032**
Position among siblings (ref= first born)			
Not first born	1.544	0.799 – 2.987	0.197

++significant

Table 4: Factors associated with mother-young person relationship

Characteristics	Perceived Family function		Statistic	
	Very close n (%)	Not very close n (%)	Pearson chi square +	p-value
Age group				
15-19	66 (78.6)	18 (21.4)	0.777	0.378
20-24	93 (73.2)	34 (26.8)		
Gender				
Male	66 (84.6)	12 (15.4)	5.147	0.017
Female	93 (69.9)	40 (30.1)		
Education				
Tertiary	73 (68.9)	33 (31.1)	4.827	0.028
Secondary	86 (81.9)	19 (18.1)		
Religion				
Christianity	136 (75.6)	44 (24.4)	0.026	0.871
Islam	23 (74.2)	8 (25.8)		
Socio-economic class				
Higher	133 (73.5)	48 (26.5)	2.409	0.169 ^b
Lower	26 (86.7)	4 (13.3)		
Family type				
Monogamy	103 (73.6)	37 (26.4)	1.508	0.219
Polygamy	34 (82.9)	7 (17.1)		
First born				
First born	49 (74.2)	17 (25.8)	0.064	0.800
Not first born	110 (75.9)	35 (24.1)		
Last born				
Last born	33 (86.8)	5 (13.2)	3.293	0.070
Not last born	126 (72.8)	47 (27.2)		

b= Fisher's exact statistic, +df=1, n=number

Table 5: Multiple logistic regression models for predictors of mother-young person relationship

Independent variable	Dependent variable- Relationship with Mother (Very close= 1; Not very close = 0)		
	Odds Ratio	95% CI for odds Ratio	Significance p
Sex of respondent (ref= male)			
Female	3.034	1.293 – 7.117	0.011 ⁺⁺
Socio-economic class (ref=higher class)			
Lower class	0.881	0.262 – 2.961	0.881
Educational attainment (ref secondary)			
Tertiary	0.527	0.252 – 1.101	0.088
Family type (ref= monogamous)			
Polygamous	0.676	0.265 – 1.729	0.414
Position among siblings (ref= last born)			
Not last born	0.392	0.125 – 1.231	0.109

++significant

Perceived family function of respondents

Both father-young person and mother-young person relationships were significantly related to perceived family function of respondents. Table 6. These relationships were significant determinants of perceived

family function of respondents. Table 7

Table 6: Association between parent-young person relationship and perceived family function

Relationships	Perceived Family function		Statistic	
	Functional n (%)	Dysfunctional n (%)	Pearson chi square +	p
Father				
Very close	87 (91.6)	8 (8.4)	8.754	0.003 ⁺
Not very close	79 (24.0)	25 (76.0)		
Mother				
Very close	138 (86.8)	21 (13.2)	5.328	0.021 ⁺
Not very close	38 (73.1)	14 (26.9)		

+ significant

Table 7: Multiple logistic regression models for parent-young person relationship and perceived family function.

Independent variable	Dependent variable- family function (functional = 1; dysfunctional = 0)		
	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio	Significance p
Relationship with Father (ref= not very close)	0.244	0.096 – 0.619	0.003 ⁺⁺
Relationship with Mother (ref= not very close)	0.264	0.109 – 0.639	0.003 ⁺⁺

++significant

Discussion

The type of family a young person belongs to can be a predictor of the future outcome of such a young person. Respondents whose parents were in a monogamous marital union, significantly perceived their families as functional than those from polygamous families. Family type has been shown to impact secondary school students' academic performance. The participants from monogamous families significantly performed better than those from polygamous and single parent families in a study.¹⁰ This was not different from what was observed in another setting where effect of family structure and parenthood on the academic performance of Nigerian

University students showed significant difference between the academic performance of students from single-parent family and those from two-parent family structure, with those from the two parent families doing better¹¹ The reason adduced to the findings in these two studies, was that children brought up in monogamous families were usually more emotionally stable and they suffer less emotional trauma and therefore good self-esteem.^{10,11}

It is very important for young persons to have good relationship with their parents. Low levels of connection between the young person and both parents, low levels of regulation from the mother, as well as high levels of psychological control from both parents and a large amount of parent-child conflict, have been associated significantly with suicide ideation in a study.⁴ In the study, high levels of parent-child conflict and low levels of father-child connection appear to be the most important independent predictors of suicidal ideation or behaviour.⁴ Good parental relationships with a young person has similarly been linked with good social initiative, lower depression and lower antisocial behavior.¹² However, on the other hand, psychological control by parents has been associated with depression and substance use.¹²

An area of importance of the bond existing between family members in the overall wellbeing of a young person is reflected in the fact that the quality of the mother-daughter relationship for instance, influences the age at which teenage girls first engage in sex.¹³ The bond ensures there is enough trust to confide in the parent, and by so doing, better guidance is provided. The father also plays a major role in the development of a young person. Father's involvement with his children in the home is associated with individual child outcomes, and according to family systems theory, such involvement is also likely to be related to broader positive family outcomes such as family functioning.¹⁴ Father's involvement has been described in being involved with caregiving tasks as well as providing emotional and psychological support and guidance to their children.¹³ Fathers who are involved with their children in playing and caregiving tasks such as diapering, preparing meals, dressing the child, and getting up at night with infants are related to positive outcomes for their children.¹⁶ Some outcomes include positive cognitive development, greater problem solving skills, greater peer competence, and school readiness.¹⁷

Limitations

Information in the study was obtained by self-reporting therefore, it is possible that certain

information may be exaggerated or withheld by respondents.

CONCLUSION

The Family genogram is an important tool in assessing different aspects of the family, adopting it in the assessment of strength of relationships among family members such as parent-young person relationships, is recommended.

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