

ROLE OF PERCEIVED HOME ENVIRONMENT IN STRESS RESISTANCE OF WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

The only problem pertained to role of perceived home environment in stress resistance of women. It was hypothesized that women with perceived favourable family environment would show higher stress resistance than those with perceived unfavourable home environment.

Stratified random samples of 400 women with perceived favourable home environment and 400 women with perceived unfavourable home environment were administered a stress resistance scale.

The finding confirmed the research hypothesis.

KEYWORDS: *Stress Resistance, Perceived Home Environment*

INTRODUCTION

Stress is unavoidable part of living because every organism faces challenges from its external environment and from its own needs and must solve this problem to survive and thrive. Evidence suggests that some stress is necessary to the well-being and a lack of it can be harmful. However, stress can affect health, well-being and performance in negative dimension (Mojoyinola, 1984; and Olaleye, 2002).

Akinboye et al. (2002) perceived stress as a person's perception by arguing that the way a person interprets and appraises the stressful event determines the effects of the stress.

Family is a social-biological unit that exerts the greatest influence on the development and perpetuation of the individual's behaviour. Each family has its own ethics and has provided to its members a philosophy of life which is communicated through non-verbal and informal means.

Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological theory assumes that human development can only be understood in reference to the structural eco-

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systems. The key importance is the principle that it is the perceived environment and not the so-called objective environment that affects human behaviour and experience.

According to Hurlock (1972) the ideal home environment is one in which all members are happy, contented and harmonious, in which each individual is respected and given rights, privileges, and responsibilities suited to his/her age and in which there is no dominance by either or both partners or by older children who are permitted to boss over younger ones.

The family environment directly influences the person's characteristic pattern of behaviour and his adjustment to life. Family environment also depends upon the community or group it belongs. If family environment is favourable, it could make an average person into distinct personality, but on the other hand, poor family environment destroys all the chances for the success of a brilliant person.

Supportive and cohesive family environments, including open communication seem to help families cope with the stresses and high level of maternal and paternal help and involvement predicted adolescents' well-being, including measures of self-esteem, life satisfaction, and mental health (Wenk et al., 1994).

De Ross et al. (1999) found that low family cohesion and high conflict and control were related to low adolescents' self-esteem and high depression.

Jo-Lohman & Jarvis (2000) found that high levels of family cohesion were associated with more adaptive coping strategies and greater psychological health in adolescents.

Family environment plays a vital role in women's life. Family provides most of the early environmental influence upon the personality which remains throughout the life. Perception of family environment varies from one stage to another stage of life cycle and also differently for both gender

groups (Gupta & Shukla, 2007; and Gupta & Joshi, 2010). Family

environment is equally important aspect in lives of working women (Agrawal, 1979; Frumm, 1993; and Flaxman, 1999).

Murch & Cohen (1988) investigated the relationships among life stress, perceived family environment, and psychological distress. Results indicated that low level of perceived family conflict and control served as life stress buffers in the prediction of distress, whereas high level of perceived independence served as a life stress exacerbator.

Wamboldt & Wamboldt (2000) also found that living with supportive family, with positive interaction, and clear communication was associated with low levels of stress, high levels of stress-coping behaviour, good psychological health, active adaptation to acute and chronic illness, and high levels of adherence to treatment. It seems that negative family functioning represents a potential source of stress, while positive interactions have buffering effect that is, reducing stress responses by enhancing emotional support and the modelling of coping behaviours amongst family members.

Herman et al. (2007) also found that family cohesion and supportive relationship between family members were associated with psychological adaptation and lower depression.

Wadkar & Mardhekar (2007) investigated the relationship between perceptions related to personal factors of women working in professional and nonprofessional fields. This study showed that there was no significant difference between women-work in professional fields and women-work in nonprofessional fields – regarding their perception of family environment, physical coping resources, and self-confidence. Mardhekar & Wadkar (2009) found that employed women perceived their family environment to be the most favourable and conducive for their personal growth than educated housewives. Educated housewives were more frustrated and had low self-confidence.

PROBLEM AND HYPOTHESIS

The only problem pertained to role of perceived home environment in stress resistance of women. More specifically, the problem was whether

women with perceived favourable home environment and those with perceived unfavourable home environment differ in respect of their stress resistance?

It was expected that women with perceived favourable home environment would show higher stress resistance than those with perceived unfavourable home environment.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Stratified random samples of 400 women with perceived favourable family environment and of 400 women with perceived unfavourable family environment were selected finally from a larger initial sample of 2000 women.

Tools

Following psychological tests were used for the purpose in the present research.

1. **Assessment of Perceived Home Environment** – The Family Environment Scale (Bhatia & Chadha, 1993) was used to assess perceived family environment of women.
2. **Assessment of Stress Resistance** – Stress Resistance Scale constructed and standardized by Ajawani & Varwandkar (2010) was used to assess stress resistance ability of women.

Procedure

Firstly, a perceived home environment test was administered on a larger population of 2000 women in Raipur City. On the basis of Q_1 and Q_3 statistics on the obtained scores on the perceived home environment scale, all the women were classified into two groups i.e., women with perceived favourable home environment (above Q_3) and women with perceived unfavourable home environment (below Q_1). Four hundred women in each of the two groups were selected randomly, and were administered the stress resistance scale. The scores on this scale served as the basis for further computations.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

It is clear from Table 1 that average stress resistance scores of women with perceived favourable home environment (M = 100.535) is higher than that of women with perceived unfavourable home environment (M = 95.75).

Table#1: Average Stress Resistance Scores of Women with Perceived Favourable and With Perceived Unfavourable Home Environment and Obtained Statistical Details

Comparison Groups	n	M	Σx^2	Obtained t-ratio	Level of Significance
Perceived Favourable Home Environment	400	100.535	69000.72	5.05	P<.01
Perceived Unfavourable Home Environment	400	95.75	74288.16		

The obtained t-ratio (t = 5.05, P<.01, Table 1) is significant at .01 level of significance providing empirical ground to conclude that women with perceived favourable home environment were truly more stress resistant than those with perceived unfavourable home environment.

Family environment is very vital to women's life (Agrawal, 1979; Frumm, 1993; and Flaxman, 1999). It is natural to believe their family environment as very congenial, feel comfortable at home or at work also, and they perceive other family members as cooperative. It is more pertinent in case of working women who otherwise feel overburdened due to their dual responsibilities.

Women, in general, are bombarded by various types of hassles which are potent enough to spoil their mood and at times may cause panic reactions. This chronic state of affairs drains out their capacity to deal with stresses encountered in life leading further to poor stress resistance. They suffer physically as well as psychologically which in turn complicates the situation. At this critical moment, if these women perceive their home

environment favourable, find family members open to discussion, sharing, and cooperative, it becomes a boom to them and as such forces a buffering system which enhances stress resistance in women in perceived favourable home environment. Perception of anything favourable involves many positive factors in the situation leading to a comfort zone for the perceiver. When a woman perceives her home environment as favourable, it is natural to believe that she is in comfort zone inspite of her continued exposure to stressors caused by daily hassles. She finds herself revitalized and thus able to face these continuous occurring stressors effectively and productively and thus shows a higher level of stress resistance.

In contrast, women with perceived unfavourable home environment are deprived of such comfort zone in their environment rather than suffer isolation, dejection, and non-empathic environment which add to their already drained out energy level to deal with stressors, leading to ineffective and nonproductive coping and thus lower level of stress resistance.

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