



## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INCOME, FAMILY SIZE AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

## Psychology

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## ABSTRACT

Family is regarded as the smallest essential unit of society and has an inevitable significance for human life. It is the first environment for an individual to satisfy his/her needs to achieve satisfaction from life, to carry out his/her functions and to grow up as a socially responsible person with the help of various resources parents provide them with. The present study aims to understand the influence that the income in a family could have on family relationships. It also intends to study the influence that family size could have on family relationships. The size of a family may play a key role in determining the extent to which the resources are diluted among the children. Parents may intend to give the best to all of their children with equal measure. However, it is quite possible for the children to have a perspective quite contradictory to that of their parents'. Thus, data was collected separately from the parents and from the children. The scale - Brief Family Relationships Scale (Ching, Allen, Henry, 2011) was administered to the parents. For children, the scales - Brief Family Relationships Scale (Ching, Allen, Henry, 2011) and Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet & Farley, 1988) were administered so also to understand how they perceive the social support they get, taking in mind the fact that many of the parents nowadays opt for a smaller family comprising of 2 children, or sometimes only one child. Data was collected from 134 children and 102 parents, their age groups being from 10-25 years and 30-60 years respectively. Pearson's product moment correlation and SPSS 16 were used to analyze the obtained data. Results and implications are discussed.

## KEYWORDS

family, relationships, perceived social support

## INTRODUCTION:

Family is regarded as the smallest essential unit of society and holds an inevitable significance for human life. A family shares emotional bonds, common values, goals and responsibilities and the family members contribute significantly to the wellbeing of each other. It is the first environment for an individual to satisfy his/her needs, achieve life satisfaction, carry out various functions and grow as a socially responsible person (Bulut, 1990). Family plays an important role in the lives of children and parents. For children, family is an important influence in shaping appropriate behavior during their early years. The future life-chances of children are strongly dependent on circumstances in their childhood (Parsons, 1949; Becker, 1991). The family we are born into, and raised in, is unambiguously of strong importance for the lives we lead. Children are dependent on parents for their needs, and a proper relationship with them helps in the core development of trust, attitude and personality (Bloom, 2018). While school, culture and economic background are notable influences, the influence of family size is the most direct and robust. In a number of ways, those other influences are also moderated by the family. (Gaynor & Runco, 1992).

Family size includes all the individuals within a household (Blake, 1980). This includes parents and children, but it may also include members of extended family (e.g., aunts, uncles, grandparents) and those who are not related by genes (in case of foster parents or stepparents living with children). Family size can be said to have an extremely strong, long-lasting and broad influence on development (Blake, 1980).

Mothers today are expected to work too and share the financial burden with their spouse; and may find it strenuous to have more than one child. Although, some opt for more than one, so as to provide children with company of siblings, since most families today are of nuclear type and have very little or no support in their immediate vicinity. Moreover, the presence of siblings is important in helping the child form its first peer group, learn social skills, conflict management skills and interaction skills. The experience of growing up as an only child is very different from growing up with siblings. The experience of having one sibling is also likely to be very different from having a large number of siblings (Skog, 2018).

Siblings may decrease the availability and transference of resources to children. Dilution theory suggests that parental resources per child decrease with the number of children. A large number of siblings dilute the resources available to a child and some findings do not suggest that siblings constitute an important source of social support (Skog, 2018). The mechanism through which siblings operate are linked neither to

the social support received from them, nor to the time invested by parents in their children. The fact that closely spaced siblings seem less affected by the dilution than siblings born further apart suggests that it is easier to allocate and balance resources to children with similar needs, and in similar phases of development. While family size impacts negatively on children in the general population, as well as in the poorest population, and in the divorced population, there is no evidence of this effect among the wealthier households. The life chances of wealthy children are not affected by family size. It seems as if affluence protects consumption, which may not affect rich families at all, while poor families' consumption may be limited by increase in family size.

Family contributes to human capital of children through parental investments and care, and thus provide children with different conditions for adult attainment (Becker, 1974 and Becker & Thomes, 1976). Endowments and resources are not fixed and mechanically transmitted to children from parents. Families are not fixed, and changes in family structure and family composition may reduce mobility and drive inequality because it changes the investment patterns of parents to children and changes the opportunities available to children (Corak, 2013). Individuals aim to maximize welfare, but their behaviors and strategies are constrained by the resources available to them. The transmission of resources from parents to children is determined by the utility maximization by parents – concerned by the welfare of their children – given their constraints of available resources (Becker, 1991). Mobility, upwards or downwards, is determined by interaction between investment, consumption and opportunities. While some resources or endowments are assumed to be transmitted by default, like culture and genetics, financial investments in children are limited by resources. Poor parents especially are assumed to be acting under heavy constraints, forced to make limited investments in children, and sometimes distribute investments unevenly between siblings. The ability to finance investments in children depends on material and immaterial resources that, in turn, depend on the number of children in the household. Additional children reduce the amounts invested in sibling when investments depend primarily on family resources. Thus, resourceful families may offset downward mobility through generous investments in their children, while families with limited resources offset upward mobility by not being able to invest (Becker, 1991).

The number of siblings has shown to be significantly associated with educational achievements (Hanushek, 1992; Oettinger, 2000; Kantarevic & Mechoulan, 2006), risk attitudes (Dohmen et al., forthcoming), positional concern (Lampi & Nordblom, 2010) and earned income.

This study thus aims to understand what might be an apparently ideal family size, considering all the factors mentioned above.

**Research problem:**

Do income and family size have an influence on family relationships?

**Objectives:**

- To study the relationship between family size and family relationships as perceived by parents and children.
- To study the relationship between income and family relationships as perceived by parents and children.
- To study the relationship between family size and social support as perceived by children.
- To study the relationship between income and social support as perceived by children.

**Hypothesis:**

1. There would be a significant relationship between family size and family relationships as perceived by parents.
2. There would be a significant relationship between family size and family relationships as perceived by children.
3. There would be a significant relationship between income and family relationships as perceived by parents.
4. There would be a significant relationship between income and family relationships as perceived by children.
5. There would be a significant relationship between family size and social support as perceived by children.
6. There would be a significant relationship between income and social support as perceived by children.

**Method:**

Survey research was used to collect data for the current study. Data was collected using convenience sampling by circulating the link to the online questionnaire. Sets of questionnaires were circulated for parents and children separately. For children, the questionnaires included Brief Family Relationships Scale (BFRS) and Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) and for parents Brief Family Relationships Scale (BFRS) was administered. Income and family size were also important variables that were considered in the study. Consent was obtained from the participants who were willing to participate in the study. Instructions were given about how they should answer the questions. They were informed that there are no right or wrong answers and asked not to ponder on a question for too long. They were asked to indicate the response that comes to their mind first. The sample of the study comprised of 134 children of the age group 10-25 years and 102 parents of the age 30-60. Pearson's product moment correlation and SPSS 16 were used to analyze the obtained data.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:**

**Table 1 indicating the relationship between family size and family relationship as perceived by parents**

Variables	r
Family size	-0.171*
Family relationship	

\*-p < 0.05

The results of the present study indicate a negative correlation between family size and family relationships. The more the number of children in a family, the more does the parent(s) have to earn and provide for them. This can lead to increasing pressure in parents which they take upon themselves so their children would not have to be deprived of the various benefits that money could bring. Although children are benefited from it, parents can be subjected to stress and pressure from the long working hours and the pressure to give their children the best. So, the reason for the current finding can be pressure felt by parents to provide for their children, so much so that they are actually unable to share their time and personalize with their family.

**Table 2 indicating the relationship between number of siblings and social support as perceived by children**

Variables	r
Number of siblings	-0.209*
Perceived social support	

\*-p < 0.05

The analysis of the data obtained from children indicated a negative

correlation between the number of siblings and their perceived social support. This might be attributed to the presence of many siblings, in case of which dilution of resources happen, which could be materialistic like income, inheritable wealth, monetary support which provides opportunities like better quality of education, upliftment of quality of life; or non-materialistic like the time parents spend with their children, emotional support, etc. The amount of these resources invested in every child of the family decreases when the number of children in the family is large. Family size affects the quality of living standards, causally and negatively; since having a large number of siblings may result in dilution of the resources available to a child. This finding is in contradiction with the research finding by Skog (2018), which reports that siblings constitute an important source of social support for children. The study by Mannion (2013) also indicates that as family size increased, reports of lower quality relations between parents and adult children also increased. In another study, (Aydiner, Copurib & Oztopc, 2016) the number of children and family relations was found to be negatively correlated to family functioning style. However, it also made other findings that there existed a positive correlation between income and family functioning style.

**Table 3 indicating the relationship between income and social support as perceived by children**

Variables	r
Income	0.201*
Perceived social support	

\*-p < 0.05

Another finding from the data obtained from children suggests a positive correlation between income received in a family and perceived social support. With a high flow of income, children do tend to feel they are being provided for. Higher income implies a higher materialistic benefits for children which could draw in more friends, which the children could possibly perceive as social support; although whether these friendships are true and genuine forms of support is questionable.

Changes in family size influences the investment patterns made by parents in their children, which can in turn potentially influence the opportunities available to children. The perception of needs by members of the family and the allocation of resources that would fulfill these needs depends greatly on income level and resources available to the family. Family needs are affected by size of the family since priorities must be readjusted with increase in the family size (Chandra, 1983). Smaller households have better chances of a privileged life when compared with relatively larger families. (Lewis, 2005). Moreover, one way through which children could understand easily their parents' love for them is when their requirements are met, most of which can be materialistic and require financial providence by their parents. In case of higher income, these requirements could be easily met and that could help explain the positive correlation between income and social support, as observed from table 3.

A similar research conducted by Yadav & Purohit (2016) gave the following results: As perceived by the children, a significant relationship was observed between family size and parent child relationship. But in the current study, there wasn't a significant relationship between family size and family relationships as perceived by children.

- As perceived by parents, the relationship between family size and parent child relationship was extremely low. In the present study, there is a significant negative correlation between those two factors.
- As perceived by children, there was no substantial correlation between family income and parent child relationship. In the present study too, there wasn't a significant relationship observed between family income and family relationships.
- From the assessment of parents, the results did not indicate any substantial correlation between family income and parent child relationship. In present study too, there was no significant relationship between family income and family relationships as viewed by parents.

We can observe from this study that children perceive a stronger social support in case of high income flow from parents and in case of lesser

number of siblings. Also parents tend to experience stronger family relationships when the number of children in family is less. Thus we can say that children today perceive better support if they have most of the resources their parents benefit them with, without having it diluted by siblings. Moreover, the parent doesn't necessarily have to be rich to provide for the children. It is obvious that with lesser number of children, most requirements of the children could still be met easily. We can see that parents too appear to have stronger family relationships with lesser number of children.

We can observe a pattern in parents and children that, children perceive stronger support when they are provided for as much by their parents with lesser number of siblings around. Parents also find their family relationships stronger with lesser children for whom they could provide more time and better quality of resources. Thus from the view of this study which seeks to study the relationship between family members, a small size of family is advantageous.

#### Implications:

The results of this study can be applied to the areas of marriage and couples counselling where the couples can be advised about the size of family to opt for, making them aware of the possible advantages and complications that the effects a family size can have on family relationships.

#### Limitations:

- Lack of data about the amount of time parents and children spend together.
- The score on Brief Family Relationships Scale (BFRS) gives a single score about family relationships and not a separate measure of the kind of relationships they share with each of their family members separately, which may not give a clarity about which relationships (parent-child, sibling-sibling, etc.) are specifically impacted by family size and income, and how.
- The ages of parents and children are of a wide range, in which they may cross various milestones and stages of life that could possibly influence the variables of the study.

#### Scope for further research

A tool that measures the kind of relationships family members share with each other separately (parent-child relationship, sibling-sibling relationship, etc.) could be administered in upcoming researches on a similar topic.

Additional variables like 'the number of working hours' and/or 'the amount of time spent with family members' could be included.

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