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# The Effect of Friend Support and Family Support on the Adjustment of First Year College Students

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**Abstract:** *Adjustment is the process of adapting to changes in the environment, which may be mental, physical and occupational. It also refers to being able to balance out conflicting needs, or bringing back the state of homeostasis. A well adjusted person is able to adapt to their surrounding efficiently, in a healthy way and is able to perform the tasks expected of them, and are able to have valuable contributions towards their friends, family, peers and the society at large. It was found that both family support and peer support were positively correlated to the overall adjustment of first year college students. However, family support and adjustment had a higher correlation (0.266) as compared to the correlation between friends support and adjustment ( 0.259). This can be alluded to the fact that India is a collectivistic country, and family support and values have a higher priority than the support of friends and acquaintances.*

*The scales used in this research were Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (Baker & Siryk, 1984), and PSS – Fa and the PSS – Fr (Prociano and Heller, 1983 ).*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Adjustment is the process of adapting to changes in the environment, which may be mental, physical and occupational. It also refers to being able to balance out conflicting needs, or bringing back the state of homeostasis. A well adjusted person is able to adapt to their surrounding efficiently, in a healthy way and is able to perform the tasks expected of them, and are able to have valuable contributions towards their friends, family, peers and the society at large. Adjustment can be categorised into two types – normal adjustment and abnormal adjustment

Normal adjustment is when the person is able to adjust, and they do it in a way which is in accordance to the established norms of the society, and it is psychologically and mentally healthy, and is not deviant. An example of normal adjustment would be a mother navigating her way through the empty nest syndrome. It would be very natural for it to feel the absence of her child, but she would try and process her feelings by herself or with the help of her close family and friends. Abnormal adjustment refers to when the person is not able to adjust in accordance to the norms of the society, and their behaviour is not normal. It is distressing, deviant, dysfunctional, and a menace to the person and their surroundings. For example, when a person turns towards abusing illegal substances / medications to relieve themselves of the stress of having an abusive parent.

Social adjustment is one of the most important types of adjustment to be achieved. Humans have this innate desire to be accepted into social groups. They often mould their behaviours according to the norms of the society. In our social world, it is a determinant of a lot of things. In schools and universities, a lot of teachers and professors tend to favour students who are extroverted and able to mingle up with students and professors alike. At workplaces, the people who are able to have cordial relationships with their co – workers and bosses alike, are favoured for promotions over people who might be technically more skilled and talented than their extroverted counterparts, but due to their relative lack of social skills and adjustment, are passed over during promotions.

In social institutions like schools and colleges, social adjustment is an important factor in determining the success of an individual. There are two extremely important factors which are necessary for the adjustment of the individual.

These factors are –

### A. Family Support

Family support does come under the category of social support. It refers to the psychological and material support offered to family members during stressful times. It can include emotional support ( in which the mother motivates the child to study harder for their next exam when the result did not come as expected, or listening to her daughter’s first break up, and comforting her ), or material support ( providing the daughter the dress she has been wanting to cheer her up after a bad test performance ), or even informational support ( finding out the dates of the exam the daughter has to sit for, as she is busy studying for it).

### B. Peer Support

Peer support is also a component of social support. It is the support of friends and the peers when adversity strikes, and in general. It includes listening to your friend vent out about her shitty job, or an emotionally unavailable boyfriend, bringing a tub of ice cream during her periods, or just being there for her when she needs an emotional support system. It also includes the components of material support (e.g buying a pen for your roommate when they are studying for finals ), emotional support ( listening to your friend vent out about her emotionally unavailable and a jerk of a boyfriend ) informational support ( providing information about the job she has always wanted ). Teenagers and young adults usually prefer their peers and friends over their family members, as a lot of them feel closer to their friends than parents, and a study done on the teenagers from a socioeconomically weaker section in western Australia, showed that the impact of emotional support from peer was more beneficial to their mental health as compared to teenagers who spent their time with parents or the other elders around them. This was true especially for girls. According to the study, girls rely more on social support than guys. Peers often encourage teens, and are able to coax them out of their bad moods better than elders or even parents. Therefore, most of the teenagers and even young adults prefer the company of their peers over their parents or the other grown ups around them.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

*Cheng Xu & Wenhua Yan (2022, November)* studied the relationship between parenting styles and the social adjustment of university students, as well as the mediating effects of attachment avoidance and friendship quality. The method of sampling used was convenient sampling and the sample size of 501 chinese students. According to the study, a high power distance and an authoritarian style of parenting inhibits the social adjustment and development of children. Since Chinese parents feel that their kid will always need their guidance, they tend to be overprotective, which can be stifling for the children. Also, this attitude can affect the attachment style of the children, and the bonding and attachment between parents and children.

*Veronica Leo Lon (2019)* aimed to study the relationship between social support and the adjustment of college students in Ecuador. Social support is very important for the adjustment of college students. Even the study confirmed it, stating that social support was extremely important for the proper adjustment of college students, with the strongest correlation between peer support and college adjustment. However, the support of the family had the lowest correlation between the adjustment of college students. The reason that was postulated was since the students attended a State University and most of the students were first generation learners, there was a lot of stress on them to do well in university.

*Veronica Darlow, Jill M. Norvilitis & Pamela Schuetz (2017, May)* conducted a study examining the role of helicopter parenting and its effects on anxiety, depression, self-efficacy and adjustment to college. The sample size consisted of 294 college students. It was postulated that the students having overprotective parents will have higher levels of anxiety and depression and lower levels of self efficacy which would affect their adjustment. The study confirmed the hypothesis, stating that helicopter parenting had an inverse affect on the adjustment of college students, and the students reporting higher levels of helicopter parenting were less likely to want parental support and intervention.

*Gerald M. Reid, Melissa K Holt, Chelsea E. Bowman, Dorothy L Espelage & Jennifer Grief Green (2016)* studied the impact of perceived social support on the anxiety and depression levels of first year college students who had undergone bullying in high school. There were 1474 students from whom data was collected from a web based survey in the fall of 2012, with a follow up survey conducted in the spring of 2013. The results showed that higher levels of perceived social support, and family support acted as a buffer against the negative effects of bullying in high school, thus leading to lower levels of anxiety and depression.

*Arlene T. Gordon-Hollingsworth, Julia E. Thompson, Meghan A. Geary, Mark A. Schexnaildre, Betty S. Lai, and Mary Lou Kelley (2015)* studied the social support and adjustment of children. The scale is a 50 item log scale for children aged from 8 – 18 years with the five factors representing the various facets of adjustment, which includes relatives ( parents, uncles, aunts ) and non relative support ( teachers, coaches ). It has a high internal consistency, ranging from 0.89 to 0.97 Cronbach's alpha. The results showed that higher the parental support, the higher the social adjustment. Also, for non Caucasian samples, a stronger correlation between relative's social support and the adjustment of children was seen.

*Lisa M Goguen, Alicia H. Nordstrom, Marnie Hiester (2008, November)* studied the role of peer relationships in the adjustment to college. The sample size was 271 first year college students, with a population of 63 % females, selected by convenience sampling. A short term longitudinal study was conducted on them. It was found that greater the quality of friendships and the support from peers, the better the adjustment to college.

*Nina S. Mounts, David P Valentiner, Katherine L Anderson & Michelle K Boswell* ( 2006 ) studied the impact of shyness, sociability and parental support for the transition to college. A path model was tested in a sample size of 360 students, which consisted of ethnically diverse students. When multiple regression analyses suggested that loneliness, rather than friendship quality, were related to adolescents' anxiety and depression. In addition, the correlation between shyness and sociability had a higher level of anxiety, and it was true for African-American adolescents .Also, high levels of sociability in combination with low levels of parental support for the college transition were related to high levels of anxiety. For White adolescents, only loneliness was a predicting factor in anxiety.

*Jessica M Dennis et al.* ( 2005 ) conducted a study on the motivation, parental support and peer support on the academic adjustment of ethnic minority first year college students. The study was conducted on 100 college students. Results indicated that personal / career related motivation was a predictor in the academic adjustment, along with peer support. A lack of peer support was correlated with a lower level of academic adjustment and lowered GPA.

*Amith Ben – David, Ronit Leichtentritt* ( 1999 ) studied the impact of family, social support and coping strategies on the adjustment of Ethiopian and Israeli college students. More specifically, it studies the impact of coherence, coping styles, family cohesion and social support on the academic adjustment of Ethiopian as well as Israeli college students. The sample size was 46 from each nationality, and the academic adjustment was assessed on the basis of the students' perceived competence, satisfaction with their studies and their overall GPA. Results showed that the adjustment of Ethiopian students adjustment was different from the adjustment of Israeli students, as Ethiopian students had to adjust in the socio cultural conditions of Israel.

*Alvan, S. L. J., Belgrave, F. Z., & Zea, M. C.* (1996) attempted to examine the role of social support and stress on the adjustment of Latino students. Measures of social support, stress and adjustment was obtained from 77 students. It was found that social support was positively correlated with the adjustment of students, and negatively correlated with the stress levels of students. Also, emotional support was a greater predictor of college adjustment as compared to instrumental support.

*Guadalupe de la Iglesia , Juliana Beatriz Stover a , Mercedes Fernández Liporacea* studied the impact of perceived social support and the academic achievement of college students in Argentina. The research aimed at studying the impact of perceived social support on the academic achievement of Argentinean college students, with a sample size of 760 students. The perception of social support was assessed by the support provided by teachers, peers, parents, best friends and boyfriends / girlfriends. The main hypothesis was higher the social support, higher the level of academic achievement. The hypothesis was accepted, but it was more applicable towards girls, who valued peer support more than guys did.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Aim

The aim of the research is to study the role of parental support and peer support on the adjustment of first year college students.

#### B. Objectives

- 1) To study the correlation between the amount of parental support and college adjustment.
- 2) The correlation between the amount of peer support and college adjustment.

#### C. Hypotheses

- 1) There would be a significantly positive correlation between the peer support and the overall adjustment of college students
- 2) There would be a significantly positive correlation between family support and the overall adjustment of college students.

#### D. Variables

- 1) College adjustment
- 2) Peer support
- 3) Family Support

#### E. Sample & Its Selection

A sample of 120 first year undergraduate college students was selected from the disciplines of B.A Llb, B.A Public Administration , B.Sc Geology. Forms were handed out to the kids enrolled in second semester of first year. The samples were chosen as per convenience. Professors who taught them were persuaded to let them fill up the forms. They were given the choice to participate in the collection of data.

*F. Description Of The Tools Applied*

The tools used in the study were –

1) *Student Adjustment to College Questionnaire ( Baker and Siryk, 1984 )*

The student adjustment to college questionnaire, which was developed by Baker and Siryk, is a scale used to assess the overall adjustment to college. It is a 67 item self report designed inventory. It assesses adjustment in four major areas –

- a) Academic Adjustment
- b) Social adjustment
- c) Emotional adjustment
- d) Attachment to the institution

Responses are usually provided on a nine point scale, which ranges from applies very closely to me to not applicable at all. It has an internal consistency of Cronbach alpha values ranging from .92 to .94.

2) *Perceived Social Support ( Family and friends ) ( PSS – Fa ) ( PSS – Fr ) ( Procidano and Hellar, 1983 )*

The Perceived Social Support Scale for family and friends was developed to assess the extent to which their need for peer and family support is fulfilled by their near and dear ones, namely friends and family. It consists of 20 items each, consisting of a total of 40 items. Although the original version of the test consists of a total of 40 items, the newer versions consist of a total of 20 items, each subscale having 10 items each. The original version consists of a good internal consistency, with a Cronbach alpha of 0.88 & 0.90 for the perceived friend support scale and perceived family support scale respectively.

3) *Procedure*

Student Adjustment to College questionnaire ( SACQ ) and Perceived Social Support – Friends and Family ( PSS – Fr & PSS – Fa ) was distributed among the first year students pursuing their bachelors. A brief rapport formation was conducted to make the students feel relaxed and comfortable and were reassured that their responses would be kept anonymous and will not be misused in any way. Also, it was made sure that the environment was well lit and comfortable. The students took around 20 – 40 minutes to fill up the forms. Then the forms were collected and the participants were thanked for their time and patience. Then, the data was fed into Microsoft excel, and data analysis was conducted.

**IV. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS**

*A. Correlation*

Correlation has been explored between three variables –Students’ Adjustment (SA), Family Support (FS) and Friends’ Support (FR) which have an effect on Students Adjustment. The relation was investigated using Pearson Correlation Coefficient and summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Pearson product-moment correlation between students’ satisfaction, family support and friends support

| Variables                 | M      | SD    | SA      |
|---------------------------|--------|-------|---------|
| Students’ Adjustment (SA) | 207.74 | 23.49 | 1       |
| Family Support (FS)       | 48.24  | 6.82  | 0.266** |
| Friends Support (FR)      | 45.32  | 6.04  | 0.259** |

\*\* Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (two-tailed)

\*Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (two-tailed)

There was a weak positive correlation between FS and SA where correlation coefficient (r) =0.266. Also, there was a weak positive correlation between FR and SA where correlation coefficient (r) = 0.259.

**B. Discipline wise Analysis of Family Support and Friends' Support**

To find the variation in Family Support (FS) according to discipline One-way between groups analysis of variance was conducted and summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 One-way ANOVA summary for variation in family support (FS) according to academic discipline

| Source        | df  | SS       | MS      | F    | p     |
|---------------|-----|----------|---------|------|-------|
| Between-group | 2   | 538.217  | 269.108 | 6.30 | 0.003 |
| Within-group  | 117 | 4997.775 | 42.716  |      |       |
| Total         | 119 | 5535.992 |         |      |       |

There was a statistically significant difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level in FS score for the three academic disciplines;  $F(2, 117) = 6.3$ ,  $p = 0.003$ . Post-hoc comparison using Tukey test indicates that the mean score for discipline 1 i.e. BBA LLB ( $M = 45.55$ ,  $SD = 7.66$ ) is significantly different from discipline 3 i.e. Public Administration ( $M = 50.72$ ,  $SD = 4.89$ ). However, families support for BBA LLB is not significantly different from Geology ( $M = 48.45$ ,  $SD = 6.74$ ). Also, the FS score for Geology is found not significantly different than the Public Administration.

To find the variation in Friends' Support (FR) according to various disciplines again one-way between groups analysis of variance was conducted and summarized in Table 3.

Table 3 One-way ANOVA summary for variation in friends support (FR) according to academic discipline

| Source        | df  | SS       | MS     | F     | p     |
|---------------|-----|----------|--------|-------|-------|
| Between-group | 2   | 60.450   | 30.225 | 0.825 | 0.441 |
| Within-group  | 117 | 4287.875 | 36.649 |       |       |
| Total         | 119 | 4348.325 |        |       |       |

There was no statistically significant difference at  $p < 0.05$ . The level of friend support (FR) score for the three disciplines;  $F(2, 117) = 0.825$ ,  $p = 0.441$ . Mean score for BBA LLB ( $M = 45.45$ ,  $SD = 6.59$ ) is not significantly different than Geology ( $M = 44.40$ ,  $SD = 6.36$ ) and the third discipline i.e. Public Administration ( $M = 46.12$ ,  $SD = 5.10$ ).

**V. DISCUSSION**

Adjustment is the ability to adapt according to the environment and the norms of the society. Some types of adjustments are temporary, like adjusting to ones school, or even adjusting to ones college or university. On the other hand, there are some adjustments that are relatively more permanent, like adjusting to ones family, friends and loved ones.

There was a weak positive correlation between student adjustment, and friend support. Correlation coefficient consists of 0.259. It means that having good friends, or peer support, helps you get through college, even if you don't feel the need to have people around you. Friends can make ones' college life simpler and easier, and reduce chances of developing psychological disorders like anxiety and depression. Also, there was a weak positive correlation between family support and student adjustment. The correlation coefficient between family support and student adjustment consisted of 0.266. It shows that family support does play a vital role in the adjustment of students in college. Students who receive the support of their families fare better in colleges, and are overall happier and less stressed as compared to students who don't receive much support of the family.

Also, one way ANOVA test was also conducted between the level of family support, and friend support between the three disciplines from which the students were selected. There was a statistically significant difference between the family support of the students of BBA LLB, ( $M = 45.55$ ,  $SD = 7.66$ ) and the family support received by the students of Public Administration ( $M = 50.72$ ,  $SD = 4.89$ ). This could be due to the reasons of parents viewing law as a "male dominated" and a corrupt degree, something which is not very acceptable to conservative families.

Also, in terms of friend support, there was no statistically significant difference at  $p < 0.05$ . The value of p consisted of 0.441. The mean score for BBA LLB ( $M = 45.45$ ,  $SD = 6.59$ ) is not significantly different than Geology ( $M = 44.40$ ,  $SD = 6.36$ ) and the third discipline i.e. Public Administration ( $M = 46.12$ ,  $SD = 5.10$ ). This means that irrespective of the disciplines, the effect of friend support is something which is very consistent.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Adjustment consists of how easily adaptable one is, according to the environment around them. Human life is dynamic, we all go through various types of adjustments, to go through our lives. The transition from high school to college is a steep one, with a lot of decisions to be made regarding the choice of major to be chosen, the city in which the individual would want to pursue their higher studies ( in their hometown or a city outside their hometown ), the course structure of their major in shortlisted colleges, tuition fees, internship and job opportunities, in campus housing facilities, the overall crowd, there are a lot of decisions to be made. Also, entering college, and getting used to a new environment, can be very daunting.

Family support does play an important role in the adjustment of college students. Also, the circle of friends one makes in college determines the level of the adjustment of the individual. Although there is a mild positive correlation between family support (0.266) and friend support (0.259), the correlation between family support and social adjustment is slightly higher as compared (0.266) is higher as compared to friend support. This indicates that family support has a slightly bigger impact in the adjustment of college students, and it could stem from the fact of India being a collectivistic country, with a high emphasis on family values and ties.

Also, according to the two tailed ANOVA test conducted among the three disciplines ( BBA LLB, public administration and geology ), there was a significant difference between the family support of the students of BBA LLB and public administration students, (  $M = 45.55$ ,  $SD = 7.66$  ) ( for BBA LLB ) and (  $M = 50.72$ ,  $SD = 4.89$  ), ( for public administration ). This could signify how some disciplines, like law, might be not favoured by some conservative Indians, as it is considered to be a corrupt degree.

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