

Temperament of adolescents as a function of their type of family

■ ASMITA DHYANI AND RITU SINGH

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See end of the paper for authors' affiliations

Correspondence to :

RITU SINGH

Department of Human Development and Family Studies, G.B. Pant University of Agriculture and Technology, Pantnagar, UDHAM SINGH NAGAR (UTTARAKHAND) INDIA
Email:ritu.singh07@gmail.com

■ **ABSTRACT** : Present study assessed the difference in the temperament of adolescents being brought up in foster home and biological nuclear families. SOS Children's Village was the purposively selected foster home for the present study. The sample for the present study comprised of forty five (45) 14-18 year old adolescents from SOS Bhimtal and an equivalent number of respondents from biological nuclear families of Bhimtal itself, thus, making a total of 90 respondents for the present study. Temperament of the adolescents was assessed by administering Dimensions of Temperament Scale by Chadha and Chandan (2005). Results revealed that boys, irrespective of their type of family, were significantly more aggressive and impulsive than their counterparts whereas, girls from both the families were significantly more warm and tolerant than the boys. Comparison of temperament of respondents across their type of family revealed that respondents from foster home were significantly more secretive, responsible, tolerant and tough-minded than their counterparts. On the other hand, respondents from the biological nuclear families were significantly more placid, sociable, reflective and cooperative than those being brought up in the foster home.

■ **KEY WORDS** : Temperament, Adolescence, Foster home, Biological family; Nuclear family

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The term adolescence is derived from the Latin verb *adolescere* which means "to grow up." Adolescence is considered as a transitional phase, a "status passage" between childhood and adulthood. When adulthood is characterized by autonomy and self-determination, adolescence is the preparation for adult status. Thus, during this period an individual encounters extremely chaotic and taxing experiences in life due to transition from childhood to adulthood. But the extent to which adolescent deal with these stressful experiences of life depend a great deal on his/her temperament.

Temperament is the characteristic phenomenon of an individual's emotional nature including his susceptibility to emotional stimulation, his customary strength and speed of response, the quality of his prevailing mood and all the peculiarities of fluctuation and intensity of mood.

Temperament evolves and becomes thoroughly specialized during the childhood as personality trait and demonstrates evidences of continuity and association from early childhood to adolescence (Galambos and Costigan, 2001). Whatever their origin, it is widely accepted that temperament

both helps to shape, and is itself shaped by the social environment in which an individual develops and lives. Incontestably, a happy family in which an individual is born acts as the most basic and intimate context for establishment of appropriate temperament among adolescents besides grooming their personalities and identities. A happy home or healthy family helps us endure through tough times and bring joy and pleasure into life. But unfortunately, certain dreadful experiences like loss of parents or maltreatment at home has made orphans and destitute adolescents deprived of this joy and pleasure. Thus, foster homes have been set up for the welfare and assistance of such vulnerable orphans and destitute children.

Extensive review of literature revealed that numerous comparative studies have been conducted on the adolescents from foster homes; residential care; orphanages etc. but very limited research is observed highlighting the difference in temperament pattern of adolescents being reared up in their biological nuclear families with those being brought up in a foster home. Thus, the present study was undertaken to assess if any difference exists in the temperament of adolescents

being reared up in two different sort of family settings *i.e.*, the natural/biological family- where an adolescent lives with his/her birth parents and a foster home- where a destitute/orphan adolescent lives with his/her foster parents. The matter of concern more specifically was to find out that if an orphan/ destitute is brought up in a foster home where all his basic needs of love and belongingness; safety and security; food; clothing etc. are being met satisfactorily than, does any difference exist in the temperament of these adolescents with the one who are being reared up in their natural/biological nuclear family.

■ RESEARCH METHODS

Locale :

In India, at present, quite a few numbers of foster homes are running. However, among those, SOS Children's village was purposively chosen for the present study because of its unique concept and structure of foster home. SOS village consists of fully furnished houses situated nearby to one another. In each house, there's a woman as a motherly figure who provides care and nurturance to a group of children of varied ages. These women are specially interviewed and trained before being appointed in the village as mothers. In case of report of any sort of harsh or unkind behavior by them, they are immediately rusticated from the organization. Thus, in SOS Children's village inmates get a loving and caring environment as in any biological family. The majority of SOS village's inmates as well as the local children of Bhimtal study in Hermann Gmeiner School, a constituent body of the SOS Children's village. Thus, this school was used as a platform to draw respondents for the first sample *i.e.* adolescents from foster home as well as for the second sample *i.e.* adolescents from biological nuclear families.

Sample :

The respondents for the first sample that is adolescents from foster home were selected by census method. The entire population of SOS Bhimtal's 14-18 year old adolescents studying in Hermann Gmeiner School (45) was selected as respondents for the said sample. On the other hand, equivalent number (45) of respondents for the second sample was picked up using random sampling method from Hermann Gmeiner School, itself.

Tools :

Temperament of the respondents was assessed using dimensions of temperament scale standardised by Chadha and Chandna (2005) for Indian population. The scale is meant for assessing the temperament of 14-18 year old adolescents. This 152 item scale measures temperament of the subject under 15 dimensions namely, sociability, ascendance, secretiveness, reflective, impulsivity, placid, responsible, accepting, vigorous, co-operative, persistence, warmth, aggressiveness, tolerance and tough-minded. All the 152 items in scale are totally

objective in nature demanding response in terms of Yes and No. On each yes response, the score of 1 is awarded and for each No response, score of 0 is given.

Procedure :

The respondents were randomly approached in the foster home and school itself and purpose of the study was made clear to them. They were requested to give honest responses and were assured that their identity would be kept confidential and information provided by them would be used exclusively for the purpose of research work. The distributed questionnaire approach was used to collect information from the students. Each sample student was given the questionnaire individually and was asked to fill out the questionnaire under the supervision of the researchers.

Data analysis :

The data obtained were analyzed using statistical tools like arithmetic mean, t- test and Z-test. Arithmetic mean was calculated to sum up the characteristics (temperament) of the whole group of respondents from foster home and biological nuclear families in figures. t-test and Z- test were used to study the statistical difference in the mean scores of foster home and biological nuclear families' respondents on temperament.

■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A close perusal of Table 1 clearly shows that significant differences among respondents across gender were observed in only few dimensions of temperament such as aggression, impulsivity, warmth and tolerance.

Boys from foster home ($t=2.34, P<0.05$) and biological nuclear families ($t=2.9, P<0.05$) were found to be significantly more aggressive than girls from respective family settings. This finding is in accordance with that of Buss (1961) who claimed that women are so seldom aggressive, that female aggression is not worth the trouble to study. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) also considered it, self evident that males are more aggressive than females. Aggression is, according to his view, a typically male phenomenon. Besides aggression, boys from foster home ($t=3.01, p<0.05$) and biological nuclear families ($t=3.55, p<0.05$) were also observed to be significantly high in impulsivity than their respective counterparts.

On the other hand, girls from foster home ($t= 3.3, p<0.05$) and biological nuclear families ($t=2.68, p<0.05$) were found to be significantly better than boys on warmth component. Girls from foster home were also noticed to be significantly better in tolerance ($t= 2.04, p<0.05$) as compared to the foster home boys. One reason behind significant gender difference in these dimensions can be simply that in India, since birth girls are socialized to be more nurturing, submissive and tolerant whereas, aggressiveness is a trait that has been favoured in boys since ages.

Table 2 reveals comparison of temperament of the

respondents across type of family. Under the sociability component of temperament, it was seen that respondents from biological nuclear families were significantly more sociable ($Z=3.97, P<0.05$) than their counterparts. This finding is in accordance with that of Quinton *et al.* (1986) who reported that problems may exist for former foster children in forming stable cohabiting situations, in parenting, and in establishing integrated social relationships in their community.

Significant differences were also observed in the

secretiveness and reflectivity dimension of temperament. Respondents from foster home were found to be significantly more secretive ($Z=3.48, p<0.05$) as compared to the respondents from biological nuclear families. On the other hand, respondents from biological nuclear families were observed to be significantly more reflective ($Z=3.09, P<0.05$). Some of the studies have revealed that the extent of secretiveness and reflectivity (or self disclosure) in an adolescent depends greatly on the nature and quality of parent-

Table 1: Comparison of temperament of the respondents from foster home and biological nuclear families across gender

Dimensions of temperament	Foster home (n=45)				t calculated	Biological nuclear family (n=45)				t calculated
	Girls (n=28)		Boys (n=17)			Girls (n=16)		Boys (n=29)		
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Sociability	7.17	1.46	7.76	1.60	1.27	8.93	1.91	8.72	1.79	0.36
Ascendant	5.39	1.31	5.29	1.61	0.22	5.87	1.25	5.82	1.03	0.14
Secretiveness	5.00	2.12	8.76	1.88	6.01	6.62	2.47	6.58	2.17	0.06
Reflective	6.32	1.63	6.23	1.14	0.22	7.12	1.58	7.44	1.86	0.6
Impulsivity	3.57	1.25	4.68	1.11	3.01*	3.81	1.27	2.58	1.02	3.55*
Placid	6.46	1.47	5.47	2.09	1.86	7.31	1.13	6.82	2.36	0.78
Accepting	4.32	1.24	4.05	1.34	0.69	4.31	1.30	4.24	1.29	0.17
Responsible	6.64	1.72	6.29	1.82	0.65	7	1.26	7.37	1.37	0.90
Vigorous	7.89	2.37	8.70	2.91	1.02	9.25	2.32	8.62	2.75	0.78
Cooperative	8.28	2.30	8.41	2.39	0.18	10.25	1.87	9.82	2.25	0.6
Persistence	5.32	1.12	4.88	1.21	1.24	4.62	1.89	5.10	1.56	0.9
Warmth	9.46	2.18	7.52	1.34	3.30*	9.93	1.65	8.76	1.25	2.68*
Aggressiveness	3.77	1.37	4.4	1.77	2.34*	3.22	1.35	4.55	1.52	2.9*
Tolerance	7.35	2.49	6.24	1.15	2.04*	6.81	1.72	6.24	1.76	1.05
Tough Minded	4.39	1.96	4.70	1.44	1.6	3.43	1.41	3.96	1.34	1.23

Note: Table value for t = 1.96 , * Indicate significance of value at P=0.05

Table 2: Comparison of temperament of the respondents from foster home and biological nuclear families across type of family

Dimensions of temperament	Foster home (n=45)		Biological nuclear family (n=45)		Z Calculated
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Sociability	7.40	1.52	8.80	1.81	3.97*
Ascendant	5.35	1.41	5.84	1.10	1.84
Secretiveness	6.60	2.26	5.22	1.39	3.48*
Reflective	6.28	1.45	7.33	1.75	3.09*
Impulsivity	3.42	1.32	3.66	1.18	0.91
Placid	6.08	1.78	7.00	2.01	2.30*
Accepting	4.22	1.32	4.26	1.28	0.15
Responsible	7.24	1.33	6.60	1.38	2.24*
Vigorous	8.20	2.59	8.84	2.60	1.17
Cooperative	8.33	2.31	9.33	2.21	2.10*
Persistence	5.15	1.16	4.93	1.68	0.72
Warmth	9.64	1.90	9.48	2.15	0.37
Aggressiveness	4.82	2.04	4.48	1.82	0.83
Tolerance	7.37	2.47	6.44	1.75	2.06*
Tough minded	4.5	1.77	3.77	1.37	2.18*

Note: Table value for Z = 1.96 , * Indicate significance of value at P= 0.05

adolescent relationship. For example, Finkaenauer *et al.* (2002) found that for both early (12- 13 year olds) and late (16-18 years old) adolescents, secrecy (but not disclosure) was related with poorer relationships with parents, more physical complaints and more depressed mood. Smetana *et al.* (2006), on the other hand, reported that adolescents who viewed themselves obligated to disclose to parents will disclose more and conceal (keep secrets) less. According to the findings of Kerr *et al.* (1999), trust (both parent's perception of trust in their adolescent's and adolescent's perception of trust in their parents) would be associated with self-disclosure in adolescents.

Same reasons, as above findings, can be accorded for the foster home respondents being more secretive and biological nuclear families' respondents being more reflective. Respondents from the biological nuclear families might feel more obligated to disclose and share things with their biological parents due to their belief and trust in them. Foster home respondents, on the other hand, might feel more reluctant and hesitant and less obligated in sharing their views with the foster parent and thus, prefer to keep secrets.

Respondents from foster home were found to be significantly more responsible ($Z=2.24, P<0.05$) as compared to the respondents from biological nuclear family. The reason behind this could be that in SOS adolescents are assigned the duties to perform household chores like dusting, washing clothes, helping in cooking etc. in order to promote independence and self-sufficiency in them. Same may not be true for adolescents from biological nuclear families who perhaps tend to feel comparatively less obligated than foster home adolescents to discharge their duties and responsibilities so seriously.

Respondents from the foster home were also observed to be significantly better than those from biological nuclear families in tolerance ($Z=2.06, P<0.05$) and tough mindedness ($Z=2.18, p<0.05$). This can be due to the distressful events and experiences they have undergone such as the loss of a parent or maltreatment at their natural home. It has made them more tolerant and tough minded. On the other hand, respondents from the biological nuclear families were found to be significantly more placid ($Z=2.30, P <0.05$) and cooperative ($Z=2.10, P <0.05$), than those being brought up in the foster home. This can be probably due to the natural unconditional faith, sense of belongingness, security and sharing that exists with one's natural/biological family.

Besides these, there were few dimensions of temperament such as ascendant, vigorous, warmth, aggression and impulsivity in which no significant differences were observed among the respondents across type of family. It is in contrast with the findings of Joseph (1996), who revealed that children placed in foster care have higher rates of depression, poor social skills and are more impulsive, become more aggressive, and are more insecurely attached and have insecure and disordered attachment behaviours.

Conclusion :

Adolescence is an important phase of life during which personality patterns and temperamental traits of an individual start getting distinguished and enhanced and a healthy home or happy family contribute to maximum extent in fortification of these temperamental traits. Adolescents share an unconditional bond of faith, security and belongingness with their biological/natural parents due to which certain positive traits of their character and personality such as sociability, reflectivity and cooperativeness get enriched to great extent. Adolescents who are reared in foster homes also exhibit enhancement of positive temperamental traits like responsibility, tolerance and tough mindedness perhaps due to the tough time and sufferings they have gone through in past life.

Authors' affiliations:

ASMITA DHYANI, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, G.B. Pant University of Agriculture and Technology, Pantnagar, UDHAM SINGH NAGAR, (UTTARAKHAND) INDIA

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