

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



Role of Family Environment in the Internalization of Sustainable Personal Values among Young Adults

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Abstract

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Objectives: The present study aimed to explore the relationship between the family environment at home and personal values of Indian young adults. Further, it also examined the role of family environment in predicting and influencing the development of their values. **Methods:** Employing a cross-sectional study design, data were collected from 385 college students (18-20 years old) during April 2023-May 2024, residing in the Indian cities of Ahmedabad and Jaipur through a survey method. The participants were administered a demographic information sheet, the family environment scale, and the twenty-item value inventory to assess the family environment and personal values of the young adults. The data was analysed for descriptive statistics, bivariate correlation, and regression analysis. **Findings:** The results revealed significant relationships between the family environment and the values of the participants. For instance, benevolence showed a positive, but weak, correlation with all dimensions of the family environment, specifically cohesion ($r = 0.13$, $p < 0.05$), expressiveness ($r = 0.21$, $p < 0.01$), etc. Similarly, values of universalism and self-direction showed a positive and significant correlation with all the dimensions of family environment. Regression analysis indicated that a cohesive and caring family environment, which provides enough space for expression of emotions, plays a pivotal role in nurturing values such as benevolence (adj. $R^2 = .148$), having a sense of self-direction (adj. $R^2 = .208$), universalism (adj. $R^2 = .131$), and security (adj. $R^2 = .155$) among young adults. **Novelty:** The study demonstrates how different aspects of family, and its environment can either support or discourage the development of certain values. It offers valuable insights that are relevant to the real-life challenges faced by young adults in the fast-changing social landscape.

Keywords: Home environment; Sustainable family; Young adults; Benevolence; Universalism; Stress-resistant

1 Introduction

Young adulthood represents the stage of development marked by the transition from adolescence to adulthood, involving greater independence, broadened horizons, and identity development.⁽¹⁾ These new experiences allow the young adults to re-evaluate their values and internalise them according to their preferences and opinions, which are vulnerable to external influences in this age of science, technological advances, and the unescapable upsurge of social media usage.⁽²⁾ Personal values, as proposed by Schwartz⁽³⁾, can be understood as the values that are subjectively held by individuals and direct their behaviour, attitudes, preferences, as well as decisions.⁽⁴⁾ The family or home environment plays a pivotal role in instilling, reinforcing, or challenging the values.⁽⁵⁾ Within this context, the family functions as an anchor by inculcating enduring values as well as providing stability to the young adults, which helps them to stay grounded and true to their beliefs⁽⁶⁾, instead of getting swayed and confused due to peer pressure, social comparisons, and information overload.⁽⁷⁾ The Sustainable Development Goal 3 of good health and well-being can be easily achieved if we understand how a sustainable family environment can facilitate the development of healthy personal values in the youth.

The basic values theory put forth by Schwartz⁽³⁾ categorises 10 broad personal values, including conformity, benevolence, tradition, self-direction, etc. Although the universality of these values across cultures has been widely accepted, the role of specific family environment dimensions, such as cohesion, conflict, independence, acceptance, and caring, etc., which shape their internalization during young adulthood, has not been properly studied by the existing research. The contrast between the presence and absence of a healthy family environment is particularly significant. A family climate that feels warm, supportive, cohesive, and allows its members to freely express themselves may encourage prosocial values such as benevolence, along with improving their overall life satisfaction and well-being.⁽⁸⁾ On the other hand, the absence of such an environment, i.e., an environment characterized by excessive conflict, neglect, lack of structure, and open communication, can weaken the value system of the youth, along with harbouring a sense of self-doubt and loneliness, and externalization problems.⁽⁹⁾ Additionally, the existing studies have largely been conducted on adolescents and do not consider the young adults, who are at a stage of greater autonomy and identity consolidation, hence, need stronger support from their family members. Furthermore, while the existing literature enhances our understanding of general family climate and its role in the well-being, self-efficacy, academic preferences, emotional regulation, etc. of the youth⁽¹⁰⁾, very few of them have tried to systematically understand how and which dimensions of family environment predict the development of given personal values among young adults. Also, most of the studies have been conducted in Western countries, which tends to limit their application to the Indian demographic. Thus, the present study seeks to reduce these existing gaps in the literature. The findings of the study may provide educators and counsellors with information required to develop interventions that focus on promoting supportive family practices, such as family-based workshops, communication skills training, as well as psychoeducation for family members. This, in turn, would promote better mental health and overall emotional well-being of the youth, leading to healthier and more sustainable lifestyles.

Hence, the primary objective of the study was two-fold: firstly, to explore the relationship between family environment and personal values among young adults; and secondly, to find out whether the different dimensions of family environment influence the personal values held by young adults.

Based on the objectives of the current study, it was hypothesized that there would be a significant relationship between the family environment and personal values among young adults. Secondly, the different dimensions of family environment would influence and predict the development of personal values among young adults.

2 Methodology

2.1 Study Design and Procedure of Data Collection

The present study followed a correlational design. The data was gathered from 385 undergraduate students between the ages of 18 to 20 years, residing in India. The participants comprised 229 females (59.5%) and 156 males (40.5%), respectively, living in the cities of Jaipur and Ahmedabad. The data were collected between April 2023 and May 2024, from college students pursuing varying courses, including engineering, management, social sciences, commerce, as well as basic sciences. The sample size represents the target population adequately and holds sufficient statistical power required for generalization of the findings⁽¹¹⁾. The method of purposive sampling was employed to collect data, using a survey questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. Undergraduate students were invited to participate in the study and were requested to complete the survey, which consisted of basic demographic information, along with two standardized psychological tests, viz. the Twenty Item Values Inventory (TwIVI) and the Family Environment Scale (FES), to measure the variables of personal values and family environment.

The study was conducted following the Declaration of Helsinki⁽¹²⁾ and approved by the university research committee. It was a non-interventional study with single-point in time data collection. Anonymity of the participants was ensured. No personally sensitive information was collected, and confidentiality of the data was ensured. Informed consent was taken from the participants, and their participation was voluntary.

2.2 Measures of Assessment

1. **Socio-Demographic Information:** The survey included questions regarding basic demographic information, namely, age, gender, education, city/state of residence, etc., along with consent for participating in the survey study.
2. **Twenty Item Values Inventory (TwIVI)**⁽¹³⁾: TwIVI aims to assess Schwartz's 10 personal values. It is a 20-item scale. It has a 6-point Likert scale, in response to statements enquiring the respondent's similarity to the individual described in the statement, wherein the responses range from "not at all like me" to "very much like me". The scale has adequate content validity and has a satisfactory test-retest reliability.
3. **Family Environment Scale (FES)**⁽¹⁴⁾: This scale contains 69 items that assess the family environment with the help of eight sub-scales. It follows a 5-point Likert scale and has good split-half reliability, along with adequate face and content validity.

2.3 Data Analysis

The data were analysed for descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and regression analysis using SPSS version 26.

3 Results and Discussion

The descriptive statistics for the young adult sample are presented for both the family environment and personal values in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the sample on family environment dimensions and personal values

Variables		Total sample (N=385)			
		M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Family environment dimensions	Cohesion	41.52	8.33	.172	.332
	Expressiveness	28.17	5.62	.347	.999
	Conflict	37.68	6.20	.466	1.303
	Acceptance and caring	38.17	7.32	.232	.891
	Independence	28.36	4.70	.259	1.567
	Active-Recreational Orientation	25.44	5.21	.246	.413
	Organization	6.65	1.82	.050	-.261
	Control	12.56	2.63	.379	.967
	Conformity	3.97	1.22	-.395	-.522
	Tradition	3.28	1.27	-.118	-.815
Personal values	Benevolence	4.24	1.15	-.635	.072
	Universalism	4.34	1.21	-.541	-.244
	Self-direction	4.24	1.19	-.635	-.111
	Stimulation	4.01	1.15	-.410	-.153
	Hedonism	4.11	1.17	-.495	-.186
	Achievement	4.09	1.16	-.534	-.119
	Power	3.67	1.17	-.321	-.373
	Security	4.10	1.14	-.408	-.274

To understand the relationship between the family environment and personal values, the obtained data were subjected to correlation analysis. The results for the same are presented in Table 2.

According to the findings, the family environment has shown a significant and positive relationship with most of the personal values of young adults, except the value of tradition. Conflict as a dimension of the family environment is an indicator of

Table 2. Bivariate correlation analysis between family environment and personal values of the sample

Family environment dimensions	Personal values									
	Conformity	Tradition	Benevolence	Universalism	Self-direction	Stimulation	Hedonism	Achievement	Power	Security
Cohesion	-.02	-.05	.13*	.16**	.14**	.08	.08	.03	.01	.03
Expressiveness	.04	.02	.21**	.22**	.23**	.14**	.13**	.05	.10	.18**
Conflict	.16**	.04	.31**	.34**	.38**	.27**	.26**	.14**	.22**	.29**
Acceptance and caring	-.00	-.06	.14**	.17**	.18**	.09	.10	.04	.02	.07
Independence	.03	-.05	.26**	.24**	.28**	.19**	.19**	.19**	.12*	.18**
Active-Recreational Orientation	.02	-.07	.20**	.21**	.20**	.12*	.11*	.10*	.03	.15**
Organization	.10*	-.05	.27**	.27**	.30**	.21**	.24**	.17**	.11*	.22**
Control	.20**	.09	.20**	.17**	.24**	.11*	.11*	.05	.05	.09

Note: **= $p < 0.01$. * = $p < 0.05$

the expression of disagreements in the family. It has shown a significant positive correlation with all the values, except for tradition. As per Cohen's criteria⁽¹²⁾, the results indicate a moderate degree of positive association of conflict with the values of benevolence, universalism, and self-direction. The results suggest that disagreements and tension within the family can prompt young adults to look beyond the family and develop concern for others. It also raises self-awareness, as well as may make an individual focus on independent thinking and foster values of self-direction. A low strength of association was found with stimulation, hedonism, achievement, power, and security, which indicates that conflicts in the family can make youth become ego-centric and focus on self-enhancement.

Positive, significant correlations with low to moderate effect were also found for the dimensions of expressiveness, independence, and organization, indicating that families that encourage open communication, autonomy, as well as structured routines, tend to encourage the values such as universalism, self-direction, power, benevolence, security, etc., since they create a safe space which inculcates empathy and self-confidence, and provides stability, along with a sense of responsibility. Furthermore, active-recreational orientation showed low strength, positive correlations with the values of benevolence, universalism, self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, and security. This indicates that engaging in shared leisure and recreational pursuits with the family modestly contributes to the development of both prosocial and self-oriented values among young adults. Control within families has also shown positive, low correlations with the values of conformity, benevolence, universalism, self-direction, stimulation, and hedonism, suggesting that parental regulations can modestly encourage both self-oriented and socially responsible values. Both the dimensions of cohesion, as well as acceptance and caring, have shown a positive association of low strength with the values of benevolence, universalism, and self-direction. This suggests that a supportive, harmonious, and nurturing family climate modestly promotes prosocial values and independent thinking among its young adults. Thus, the results corroborate our hypothesis that there exists a noteworthy relationship between family environment and the values held by young adults.

All the family environment dimensions have a notable relationship with at least three of the ten personal values under study. Conflict and organization have shown significant, positive relationships with all the values, except for tradition. This may happen if the constructive conflicts at home cause the young adults to think more clearly and deeply about their beliefs and the values they hold. It may also encourage self-enhancement values (achievement, power, hedonism) as well as self-transcendence values (benevolence and universalism). This, in turn, encourages self-direction and prosocial values among young adults⁽⁵⁾. Values such as universalism, benevolence, and self-direction can help foster emotional as well as personal growth and resilience. Families where the environment promotes the freedom to express contradictory opinions and is open to discussions in present times are more acceptable to the youth, allowing them to have an independent mindset. Thus, Independence, too, is related positively to all the values, except for conformity and tradition, while control is significantly correlated with the values of conformity, benevolence, universalism, self-direction, stimulation, and hedonism. The development of personal values is particularly important for young adults, since they provide direction, promote well-being, and also help navigate the social, academic, and career-related choices⁽¹⁵⁾, ⁽¹⁶⁾. When control at home is not overly restrictive and promotes respect for established rules, without being excessively harsh, it can provide a safe avenue for young adults to explore their environment and develop the given values⁽¹⁷⁾.

Furthermore, in order to find out which dimensions of family environment significantly predict personal values, consequently influencing their development among young adults, a regression analysis was performed. Table 3 presents the summary of the regression model, indicating that family environment significantly predicts the different personal values among young adults.

Table 3. Regression analysis to predict the variance in personal values caused by family environment

Personal values	R ²	Adj. R ²	F(df)
Conformity	.111	.092	5.84** (8,376)
Tradition	.065	.045	3.28** (8,376)
Benevolence	.165	.148	9.32** (8,376)
Universalism	.149	.131	8.23** (8,376)
Self-direction	.225	.208	13.62** (8,376)
Stimulation	.115	.096	6.10** (8,376)
Hedonism	.116	.098	6.18** (8,376)
Achievement	.083	.063	4.24** (8,376)
Power	.089	.070	4.60** (8,376)
Security	.172	.155	9.78** (8,376)

Note: Predictors- Family environment dimensions (cohesion, expressiveness, conflict, acceptance & caring, independence, active-recreational orientation, organization, control);
**= $p < 0.01$.

The results support the hypothesis that family environment indeed significantly influences the development of personal values among young adults. All the dimensions of family environment significantly predicted the variance in values. As an independent variable, family environment explained 20% of the variance in self-direction (adj. $R^2 = .208$, $F(8,376) = 13.62$, $p < .01$), 14.8% in benevolence (adj. $R^2 = .148$, $F(8,376) = 9.32$, $p < .01$), 15.5% of variance in security (adj. $R^2 = .155$, $F(8,376) = 9.78$, $p < .01$), and 13.1% in universalism (adj. $R^2 = .131$, $F(8,376) = 8.23$, $p < .01$). Similarly, the other dimensions also play a role in predicting the personal values held by young adults. The F-values here are significant at the 0.01 level, affirming that the model is fit to predict the variance in personal values among young adults caused by the family environment.

Table 4 presents a regression model consisting of the specific dimensions of the family environment that significantly influence the different personal values held by young adults. It can be observed that six out of the eight dimensions of the family environment play a significant role in predicting the development of different personal values among young adults. All the values are significant at either the 0.05 or 0.01 level.

With regards to the value of conformity, control ($\beta = .25$, $p < .01$) and conflict ($\beta = .25$, $p < .01$) within the home emerged as the strongest positive predictors, while cohesion ($\beta = -.27$, $p < .01$) was reported to be a significant negative predictor. This suggests that more control, limit-setting, and increased conflicts within the family may foster high conformity. On the other hand, cohesiveness in the family indicated a negative association with the value of conformity in this sample. Possibly, the cohesiveness as reported by this sample was on the lower side, and it was inversely related to conformity. Given that conformity as a value emphasises compliance with rules, authorities, and norms, families with low cohesiveness may respond with conforming behaviour in order to maintain stability and minimize conflict within the home. Thus, interventions focusing on family relationships and bonds may concentrate on improving the cohesion among family members, so that acceptance, security, and a sense of belonging within families improve.

Similarly, in the case of tradition, control ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$) arose as the strongest predictor, followed by expressiveness ($\beta = .25$, $p < .01$), which indicates that higher rules and regulations at home, accompanied by greater openness in terms of family communication, significantly and positively contribute to the development of traditional values among young adults. Benevolence, too, is influenced by multiple factors of one's family, with conflict ($\beta = .24$, $p < .01$) being the strongest positive predictor, followed by organization ($\beta = .17$, $p < .01$), control ($\beta = .12$, $p < .01$), and cohesion ($\beta = -.23$, $p < .01$), which emerged as a negative predictor. Universalism is significantly predicted by conflict ($\beta = .30$, $p < .01$), followed by organization ($\beta = .17$, $p < .01$), indicating that both disagreements within families as well as structured daily lives and roles within families play an important role in shaping the virtues of equality and social responsibility among young adults. Similarly, in the case of self-direction, again, conflict emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .36$, $p < .01$), followed by control ($\beta = .16$, $p < .01$), and organization ($\beta = .16$, $p < .01$), while cohesion, once again, emerged as a negative predictor ($\beta = -.31$, $p < .01$), suggesting that while a structured family environment, with moderate amount of limit-setting and challenges might promote autonomy, excessive cohesion may

Table 4. Coefficients of regression analysis to predict the variance in personal values caused by the different dimensions of family environment

Personal values	Family environment dimensions															
	Cohesion		Expressiveness		Conflict		Acceptance and caring		Independence		Active - recreational orientation		Organization		Control	
	β	t	β	t	β	t	β	t	β	t	β	t	β	t	β	t
Conf.	-.27	2.59**	.13	1.41	.25	3.46**	-.14	1.35	.04	-.61	-.01	-.17	.06	.98	.25	4.33**
Trad.	.10	-.91	.25	2.71**	.14	1.92	.14	-1.3	.11	-1.4	.12	-1.4	-.07	-1.1	.18	3.16**
Ben	.23	-2.28*	.12	1.34	.24	3.55**	.17	1.77	.12	1.72	.05	.64	.17	2.76**	.12	2.28*
Uni.	.15	-1.49	.09	1.01	.30	4.34**	.12	1.23	.03	.53	.02	.34	.17	2.66**	.05	1.01
Self-dir.	.31	3.17**	.10	1.15	.36	5.43**	.08	-.88	.11	1.64	-.02	-.28	.16	2.77**	.16	3.03**
Stim.	.15	-1.47	.03	.41	.28	4.01**	.14	1.36	.10	1.34	-.02	-.28	.16	2.52*	.03	.64
Hed	.15	-1.43	.03	.38	.26	3.70**	.11	-1.1	.09	1.28	.06	-.76	.20	3.21**	.03	.53
Ach	.12	-1.12	-.14	-1.51	.09	1.30	.09	-.93	.27	3.52**	.05	.61	.14	2.16*	.00	.15
Pow	.16	-1.51	.10	1.08	.31	4.26**	.15	1.46	.06	.81	-.08	-1.0	.08	1.28	.03	.50
Sec	.37	3.59**	.22	2.56*	.32	4.61**	.19	-1.8	-.07	-.07	.09	1.24	.20	3.29**	.02	.49

Note: **= $p < 0.01$. * = $p < 0.05$; **Abbreviations:** Conf.= conformity, Trad. = tradition, Bene. = benevolence, Uni. = universalism, Self-dir.=self - direction, Stim. = stimulation, Hedon. = hedonism, Achieve. = achievement, Pow. = Power, Sec. = Security

constrain independent thinking. Stimulation and hedonism were predicted by the dimensions of conflict ($\beta=.28$, $p<.01$, $\beta=.26$, $p<.01$) and organization ($\beta=.16$, $p<.01$, $\beta=.20$, $p<.01$), respectively, highlighting the role of both challenges within family dynamics and an organized environment, in fostering novelty-seeking as well as the pursuit of pleasure and enjoyment. The value of achievement was predicted strongly by the level of independence ($\beta=.27$, $p<.01$), and organization ($\beta=.14$, $p<.01$) available at home. Power was strongly predicted by the presence of conflict within the home ($\beta=.31$, $p<.01$), indicating that family tensions may contribute to the development of control-oriented values among young adults. Lastly, security was predicted strongly by the dimensions of conflict ($\beta=.32$, $p<.01$), organization ($\beta=.20$, $p<.01$), and expressiveness ($\beta=.22$, $p<.01$), while cohesion emerged as a negative predictor ($\beta= -.37$, $p<.01$), suggesting that while a structured family setting, with modest disagreements and open communication, promotes safety-oriented values, excessive cohesion may diminish its priority. The two dimensions of acceptance and caring, and active recreational orientation, did not significantly predict any of the ten values in this sample of young adults.

In the Indian context, Vashisht and Rishipal⁽¹⁸⁾ concluded that the family environment, including the level of support and cohesion within the home, as well as open communication and warmth received by parents, has an adequate impact on the personal values held by young adults. Prior literature, as well as the present study, hence, underscores the family as a key agent of socialization and development of value systems during young adulthood. Within the family, cohesion, organization, expressiveness, and control seem to foster value orientations, such as conformity, benevolence, tradition, self-direction, security, universalism, and hedonism⁽¹⁸⁾. Expressiveness emerged as a significant positive predictor of tradition and security, underscoring the role of open communication in the development of safety needs as well as the transmission of traditions and culture among family members. Similarly, a well-organized family environment may provide the stability and clarity needed to internalize both self-enhancement and self-transcendence values.

Furthermore, establishing control within the home, in terms of reasonable boundaries and parental guidance, can reinforce the development of individual responsibility, autonomous thought processing, and adherence to social norms.⁽¹⁹⁾ Interestingly,

although cohesion did not show a significant association with conformity, benevolence, self-direction, and security, it emerged as a significant negative predictor of these values during regression analysis. This may be due to the suppression effect, wherein overlapping with stronger predictors got partialled out, and revealed an underlying negative association. Theoretically, this finding aligns with the family systems theory of family enmeshment, wherein excessive cohesion among the members may lead to blurring of personal and emotional boundaries, which may diminish the autonomy, as well as the benevolence and security values among young adults⁽²⁰⁾. The results also indicated that conflict was a significant predictor of all personal values, except for tradition and achievement. This may transpire since conflict within the home may promote values of universalism, benevolence, stimulation, self-direction, etc., by encouraging the young adults to examine the established norms, form their own beliefs, while also adapting and accepting different perspectives around them. Meanwhile, tradition as a value focuses on preserving the established customs, which are usually challenged during conflicts.

Overall, these findings emphasize the multifaceted manner in which the family environment affects and shapes the value orientation of young adults. It functions as a dynamic system that combines warmth, support, structure, security, and even conflict, all of which uniquely contribute to the development of values among young individuals.

4 Conclusion

The family environment significantly influences the development of personal values among young adults. Given that personal values develop throughout adolescence and young adulthood, important socializing agents, such as an individual's family, tend to act as an anchor and play a crucial role in the internalization of healthy values. The results of the study highlight the way in which both positive as well as challenging dynamics within the family foster values that makes the youth mentally healthy and stress-resistant. A supportive family environment where cohesion, expressiveness, security, and independence are present leads to promoting self-enhancement and openness to new experiences. Freedom to express independent views in families allows the youth to achieve their goals and be independent. The study also aligns with SDG-3 of good health and well-being by exploring the relationship between family environment and internalization of values, which in turn plays a significant role in advancing the mental and emotional well-being of the youth in our nation. The results of the study will provide valuable insights for educators, counsellors, and caregivers to design interventions that will strengthen family environments and the values they inculcate.

Like every research, the present study has certain limitations as well. The generalizability of findings may be restricted due to the study's cross-sectional design and non-probability sampling. Data collection through self-report measures may have led to social desirability bias. Additionally, since the sample was limited to young adults from select cities and universities in India, it may not capture the broad diversity of the Indian youth, nor be generalizable to other cultural settings. Lastly, other influential factors such as gender, peers, personality, etc, were not considered, which can be considered in future research.

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