



# **Family Cohesion and Adolescent Psychological Well-being: Evidence from Senior High Schools in Ghana**

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examined the relationship between family cohesion and adolescents' psychological wellbeing using a survey research design. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 326 respondents from West Africa Senior High School and Presbyterian Boys Senior High School, Legon in the La-Nkwantanag Municipality, Accra. Data was collected using self-report questionnaires which consist of the Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scale and the Family

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Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES IV). Findings showed that a significant positive correlation exist between family cohesion and psychological wellbeing among students. Male students also reported significantly higher levels of family cohesion than female students. Result also showed that students whose parents are married have the highest level or quality of family cohesion, followed by those whose parents are separated, divorced and widowed respectively. Results finally revealed that students who live with their parents have significantly higher levels or quality of family cohesion than those who do not live with their parents. It is therefore concluded that a significant positive correlation exists between family cohesion and psychological wellbeing among students. This therefore suggests that an increase in level or quality of family cohesion leads to an increase in psychological wellbeing of adolescents in the La-Nkwantanang Municipality in Accra.

*Keywords: Family cohesion; psychological wellbeing; adolescents; quality of family; parenting.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The family is the basic unit of an individual's social system and the first socialisation agent of the growing child (Jakubowski, 2021). Children pick up many experiences (both positive and negative) from the family they find themselves. Within the developmental life span, the stage of adolescents in the family is of critical importance. According to Sandler et al. (2015) the adolescence period is characterised by a continuous search for more identity due to increasing influence by peers and constant exposure to risky behaviours. According to Bogaerts et al. (2021) many concomitant changes occur within the adolescent individual such as cognitive advances, puberty, and identity exploration.

It is worth noting that adolescence is a crisis stage in the life cycle, therefore families are called to respond to significant source of changes that is the social, psychological and biological change (Iroda et al., 2022). At the apex of these changes, the central demand of the adolescent is their ability to fit into both the family and community. An efficient adaptation by the adolescent will require a mutual balance between the needs of the adolescent and the ability of the family to provide a supportive and enabling environment to facilitate the independence of the adolescent (Iroda et al., 2022).

Amid the developmental crisis, families are called to restructure the power structure, role and relationship rules of family members to strengthen emotional bonding towards one another (Crespo & Relvas, 2024). In other words, the adolescent's perception of the receptiveness of the family relies on the ability of the family to change its pattern of interaction as a demonstration of parental support of physical affection which convey positive efforts of parents

to their children which defines their interpersonal relations within the context appropriate for showing concern while minimising developmental stress (Crespo & Relvas, 2024).

The family is much needed during this stage to help the adolescents to be sure of themselves and where they are heading in life. Since most families leave the adolescents to struggle on their own which leaves them in a state of confusion, this affects the adolescents in diverse ways in their lives including their psychological well-being (Rahgozar & Giménez-Llort, 2024). Ayse et al. (2021) provide "three functions of the family which include; providing a sense of emotional bonding for identification with a basic primary group, and enhancing emotional, intellectual, and physical closeness; to provide a model of adaptability; that is, it illustrates, through its basic functioning, how a power structure can change, role relationships can develop, and relationship rules can be formed; to provide a network of communication experiences through which the individual learns the arts of speech, interaction, listening, negotiation and other adaptive behaviours".

"Family cohesion, one of the most important values in the relationship between parents and adolescents" (Fosco & Lydon-Staley, 2020), is brought about by a good relationship between parents and children and may lead to strong family cohesion and strong feelings of identity. Family cohesion has been defined as the emotional bond that family members have toward one another (Li et al., 2021). According to Çetin (2021), family cohesion is the degree of commitment and support family members provide for one another. This family is characterised by nurturance, warmth, time spent together, consistency and physical intimacy. Poor family bonding and poor functioning are regarded as a product of family conflicts (Pearson, 2009).

Adolescents exposed to family conflict are seen to have an increased risk of emotional and psychological problems Pearson (2009) argued that conflict diminishes family cohesion, impacts adolescent development negatively and extends into adult life.

According to Olson (1993), family cohesion has four separate levels: Disengaged (very low), separated (low to moderate) connected, (moderate to high) and Enmeshed (very high). It is deduced that the separated and connected level of cohesion make for optimal family functioning whereas the disengaged or enmeshed are generally seen as problematic for relationship over the long term. Thus, balanced couple and family system (separated and connected types) tend to be more functional across, while unbalanced couple and family system (disengaged and enmeshed) often have extreme emotional separateness with little involvement among family members. The unbalanced family system is prevalent in societies where parents or guardians are not much connected to the child due to work and other social activities. In this case, family members may be unable to meet adolescents' emotional needs.

Three factors that seem particularly salient in the development of healthy personality of adolescents are family communication, social support and family conflict (Bulanda & Majumdar, 2009). "Having a supportive home environment and family communication patterns that encourage conversation and dialogue about family problems helps young adults maintain higher levels of emotional well-being and autonomy as they transition to adulthood and life outside of the family home" (Koesten & Anderson, 2004). In contrast, families that emphasise conformity and obedience to authority with parents too will experience low life satisfaction, higher rates of depression and lower self-esteem (Jackson et al., 1998; Milevsky et al., 2007).

Family social support systems such as strong sense of solidarity, reciprocity and sense of loyalty has been identified to influence the cohesion of families (Hovey & King, 1996). The provision of these support systems may serve as a life support for the family's emotional bond. In the homes of most African families, children owe great allegiance to and live under the influence and dictates of their parents' wishes. Studies have shown that the present-day African family

pattern is increasingly changing as a result of education, economic conditions and health opportunities. These variables soften exert overwhelming impact on family cohesion. For instance, socioeconomic conditions have particularly triggered changes in the ways families interact and bond leading to some relative dysfunction in the family (Malmberg, 2008). And because we have not been as successful in developing family systems that match these shifting lifestyles, many parents have no new options for providing a secure family structure (Curwin & Mendler, 2011; Melinda et al., 2010) leading to many negative psychological outcomes.

Paucity of literature on family cohesion established some agreeable correlation between family cohesion and psychological wellbeing of adolescents as espoused in the current study (Baer, 2002; Laursen & Collins, 1994). For instance, "divorce crisis may stimulate family growth and development in ways that are not available in the two-parent family system" (Baer, 2002). "Single-parent families are neither superior nor inferior to intact families, they are simply different. These differences can become sources of strength, rather than symbols of failure as dysfunctional families are sometimes inevitable" (Bulanda & Majumdar, 2009). In addition, "the moderating effect of social support on parental crisis and psychological wellbeing was examined. The result of the study indicated that adolescents from dysfunctional family reported lower psychological wellbeing than adolescent from a functional family" (Laursen & Collins, 2008). In addition, parental crisis had a negative influence on adolescent psychological wellbeing.

More so, "the negative relationship between parental crisis and psychological wellbeing was reduced when social support was present" (Sun, 2001). Laursen and Collins (2008) conclude that "parental attachment, emotional closeness, and a sense of support are necessary components of family cohesion and are important for adolescent psycho-social development, which lead to better adolescent developmental outcomes".

Wallin (2007) indicates that the basic interaction and bond paradigm develops in the early part of a child's life and travel a lifespan thus becoming the foundation for which adolescent organise interpersonal experiences. Therefore, the adolescent's psychological wellbeing is an accumulative outcome of his or her internalised

interaction and experiences which become the pathway for other expectations and behaviours in future relationships. For instance, if a child's interaction with family members was shrouded and shaped by fear, uncertainty and/or negative related experiences, such a child will develop insufficient interpersonal understanding and is likely to react to people in ways he or she was brought up (Wallin, 2007).

## 2. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

It is estimated that between 35 and 50 percent of all school-age children will experience significant shifts in their family constellation before they complete school in Ghana. This is because, both parents and children continue to spend much more time away from each other and their home. Telzer and Fuligni (2013) also points out that the adolescents are increasingly indulging in negative experiential pleasures and luxuries. This assertion is confirmed by a survey initiated by the Ghana Schools Health Survey (GSHS, 2012) which enumerates some of these negative experiential pleasures and luxuries that the youth of today engage in. These behaviours include alcohol use, risky sexual behaviours, tobacco use, and violence as well as acts of indiscipline among adolescents.

The role of family cohesion has not been given much attention in Ghana. The unique family dynamics among La Nkwantanang families could be attributed to the culturally situated concept of collectivism that places high premium not only on affection, trust, expectation, respect, sacrifice, responsibility, emotional oneness, and mixed emotions. But also contrive in filial piety in which children are expected to obey their parents in the interest of children's success.

Family relationships may have different effect on male and female students. It is said that this effect has a greater influence on females than males. This is so because, girls are said to be more likely to use social relationships as an avenue for self-disclosure, emotional intimacy, and support (Cyranowski et al., 2000; Joao et al., 2015; Rudolph, 2002). Higher levels of social support, particularly from parents, are a strong buffer against depressive symptoms for girls (Schraedley et al., 1999). For example, a decrease in family cohesion during adolescence are less pronounced for girls than boys (Tsai et al., 2013). "Strong family relationships during this time are associated with lower depressive symptoms, but only for girls"

(Telzer & Fuligni, 2013), suggesting that "girls' well-being may be more dependent on the quality of their family relationships. This strong familial importance among adolescent females continues during the transition into young adulthood" (Joao et al., 2015). For instance, "throughout the transition from adolescence to young adulthood, females tend to identify more with their family and spend more time to engage in daily family leisure activities and familial communication than males" (Tsai et al., 2013).

"The literature indicates that while parent relationships continue to be significant social bonds for adolescents and young adults, they are especially so for girls" (Joao et al., 2015). "This is due, in part, to the fact that girls rely on social relationships for greater emotional intimacy and support" (Rudolph, 2002). "Because girls rely on close relationships for emotional support and are more sensitive to any accompanying interpersonal stressors than boys" (Rudolph, 2002), changes in family cohesion are potentially more salient for girls. Thus, "adolescent females who experience declines in family cohesion during the college transition may experience greater increases in their depressive symptoms, an effect that may not occur for adolescent males" (Joao et al., 2015).

In recent times, Ghana has experienced increased incidence of suicide cases. A mental health expert, Dr. Osei Akoto, linked the incidence to depression. In 2017 alone, about fourteen cases were reported in the media (Ghanaweb, 2017). Many stakeholders blamed the mainstream media for the upsurge and little is said on the increasing gap in the emotional bond in parent-child relationship (Blege, 2017). Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist predicted long ago that decrease in social integration would lead people, especially adolescents, attempting suicide. The fight against suicide and deviant behaviours among the adolescents would not succeed unless conscious efforts in addressing issues of family cohesion and psychological well-being of adolescence is given considerable attention in the Ghanaian literature. It is therefore obvious from the above that there is the need for more research concerning family cohesion and psychological well-being of adolescents in Ghana to help address the challenges identified by scholars. The study was guided by the following hypotheses;

**H1:** A significant positive correlation will exist between family cohesion and psychological wellbeing.

**H2:** Male students will report of higher levels of family cohesion than their female counterparts.

**H3:** Students whose parents are married will have higher levels or quality of family cohesion than those raised by separated, divorced and widowed parents.

**H4:** Students who live with their parents will have higher levels of family cohesion than those who do not live with their parents.

## 2.1 Theoretical Framework: Family Systems Theory

Bowen (1985) propounded the Family System Theory after taking inspiration from Von Bertalanffy (1967)'s general systems theory. Bowen (1985)'s initial work concentrated on the emotional processes within various nuclear families, which is said to have portrayed a family's range of relationship patterns between individuals in the presence of stress (Bowen, 1985; Hargrove, 2009).

According to Brown (1999), the theory concentrates on patterns that develop in families to defuse anxiety and stress. This theory reveals that effective communication among family and closeness among family members creates an environment that enhances the psychological wellbeing of family members. This is so because under such condition's family members can seek help when they are distressed, as well as receive support (emotional, instrumental, etc.) from significant others within the family to help them to adaptively cope with psychological distress (e.g. stress, anxiety and depression).

## 2.2 Psychological Well-being Theory

Ryff (1989) distinguished six core dimensions widely used by researchers which shows that an individual has a good psychological well-being. The theoretically derived dimensions of positive psychological health included self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth.

Ryff's psychological well-being dimensions developed in 1989 has a strong linkage to mental health. For instance, self-acceptance of individual's past life, having positive attitude about oneself which is key of positive psychological functioning. Also, psychological

well-being has a significant effect on how students adjust and cope in the challenging and critical life situations in schools which is also crucial for their academic performance.

The above diagram illustrates the various dimensions of psychological well-being. The components are positive relationships, environmental mastery, autonomy, self-acceptance, personal growth and purpose in life.

Invariably, when an individual feels accepted, has positive relations with others, is autonomous, has mastery of one's environment, has a purpose in life, and experiences personal growth, one is said to have good or healthy psychological well-being. As families are the main socialisation agent of children, the predictors of psychological wellbeing should be available within a family to ensure that individual family members have a healthy psychological wellbeing.

This is so because as indicated above, components of positive psychological wellbeing, such as autonomy, self-acceptance, mastering of one's environment, personal growth and the development of a purpose in life are made possible when there is a family environment that is cohesive. It is therefore not surprising that family cohesion has a positive influence on psychological wellbeing.

Psychological well-being theory came from a lot of past models like Maslow's self-actualization developed in 1968, Roger's model which talks about fully functioning person, Erikson's Psychological model developed in 1959 and Jung's theory of formulation of individuation developed in 1933. In developing the psychological well-being theory, Ryff (1989) incorporated the above-mentioned theories as well as terminologies, such as happiness, wisdom, psychological, physical and social well-being which were used for mental health. The concept of psychological wellbeing has been described by scholars by using different terms. For instance, the term 'human flourishing' was used by Ryff and Singer (1998) to describe psychological well-being. Also, Felce and Perry (1995) are of the view that psychological well-being encompasses physical, social, material and emotional well-being. Again, Ryan and Deci (2001) opine that psychological well-being comprises of human's three psychological needs like, autonomy, competence and relatedness.

According to Schmutte and Ryff (1997), one of the areas studied frequently in psychology

literature is the concept of psychological well-being. Ryff (1989) therefore defines psychological well-being as a multidimensional construct that comprises various social, psychological and physiological aspects which may be interconnected and may influence each other. The six dimensions of psychological well-being namely: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth consist of variations of various dimensions of psychological well-being of diverse age groups that are explored through studies of persistent human experience (Rathi & Rastogi, 2007).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Design

The study employed descriptive survey. According to Cooper and Schindler (2011), descriptive survey offers a logical description that is based on facts and is precise as possible and this is tailored to the research problem. The usefulness of the descriptive sample survey for this type of research study is supported by Creswell (2010) who emphasised that the descriptive sample survey is an attempt to collect data from members of the population to determine the current status of the population concerning one or more variables. A descriptive survey seeks to find answers to questions through the analysis of relationships between or among variables (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012).

#### 2.2 Participants and Procedures

The study population comprised 5,287 public senior high school students in the La-Nkwantanang Municipality. The municipality had two public senior high schools namely, Presbyterian Boys Senior High School and the West Africa Senior High School. The distribution of the study population included 3,000 students from the Presbyterian Boys Senior High School and 2,287 (1,239 Males and 1,048 Females) from the West Africa Senior High School (The Schools' 2018 Students' Records). The sample for this study was 357 senior high school students. This figure was representative of the entire population of senior high school students in the municipality as supported by sample size determination table of Krejcie and Morgan (1970).

The respondents were selected using the simple random sampling. This technique was used because the study aimed to achieve a fairly representative view. Each respondent was chosen by chance and each member of the 5,287 population had an equal chance of being included in the sample and every possible sample of a given size had the same chance of selection. This was used because the assumption is that variations in the characteristics of the respondents were not going to affect the answers to the research questions. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the respondents for the study. In obtaining the sample for the study, a sampling frame of the population was adduced. According to Cooper and Schindler (2003) sampling frame is the list of all elements from which the sample is drawn. The sampling frame was clearly identified as the public senior high school students in the La-Nkwantanang Municipality. After obtaining the sample for each school, a list of all students was obtained from heads of these two institutions. Based on the list, simple random sampling was employed to select the respondents. In doing so, special codes were generated for each school up to the calculated sample and placed in an opaque container. A colleague researcher helped in drawing out the papers containing the codes. Those whose codes were drawn formed the sample for this study. The papers containing the codes were not replaced after they were drawn out. The number of respondents selected from each school is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Sample distribution of students by school**

Schools	Sample
Presbyterian Boys SHS	203
West Africa SHS	154
Total	357

From Table 1, 203 students were selected from the Presbyterian Boys SHS and 154 students from the West Africa SHS to participate in the study.

#### 3.3 Measures

##### 3.3.1 Family Cohesion Scale (FCS)

This study adapted the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES IV) of a family self-report assessment designed to assess family cohesion and family flexibility which are the two central dimensions of the Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems (Olson,

Gorall, & Tiesel, 2000). The scale had a psychometric property making it a good tool for this study. An alpha reliability analysis revealed that Enmeshed = .77, Disengaged = .87, and Balanced Cohesion = .89. Aggregately, Boyraz and Sayger (2011) found a Cronbach's alpha value of .95 for the cohesion scale. Thus, reliability is acceptable for research purposes (Boyraz & Sayger, 2011). The subscale contained 21 statements arranged in a 4-point Likert-type scale with responses ranging from *Strongly Disagree* (1) to *Strongly Agree* (4). Some statements making the subscale included: *"Family members feel very close to each other: We get along better with people outside our family than inside: We spend too much time together"*. The original scoring for each item was 1-4, giving a possible score range of 21-84.

### 3.3.2 Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWS)

Ryff's 42-item psychological wellbeing scale was adapted to measure psychological wellbeing. The scale consists of a series of statements reflecting the six areas of psychological wellbeing: Autonomy (items 1, 7, 13, 19, 25, 31, and 37), Environmental Mastery (items 2, 8, 14, 20, 26, 32, and 38), Personal Growth (3, 9, 15, 21, 27, 33, and 39), Positive Relations with Others (items 4, 10, 16, 22, 28, 34, and 40), Purpose in Life (5, 11, 17, 23, 29, 35, and 41) and Self-acceptance (items 6, 12, 18, 24, 30, 36, and 42). Each sub-scale consists of 7 items. Respondents rate statements on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 4 indicating strong agreement. Negatively worded items (# 3, 5, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 26, 27, 30, 31, 32, 34, 36, 39, and 41) were reversed scored so that higher scores on each subscale represent higher perceived positive functioning in the corresponding area. Also, higher scores for all 42 items indicate higher overall psychological wellbeing. Total scores per subscale can range from 7-28 and total scores for the entire instrument can range from 42 to 168.

The psychometric properties of the SPWB have been demonstrated as strong. For example, the scale has been tested among samples in English speaking countries with reported Cronbach alpha ranging from 0.77 to 0.90 (Kafka & Kozma, 2002). The scale was used to assess the psychological wellbeing of orphans in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (Afework, 2013). The reliability of the instrument was determined for the total and the subscales using Cronbach's alpha. The computed Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.8 for Autonomy, 0.67 for Environmental mastery, 0.75 for Positive relation with others, 0.69 for Self-acceptance, 0.6 for Personal growth, 0.67 for Purpose in life and the total PWB scales was 0.89. In Ghana, the instrument was administered to 201 adolescents in the Greater (Akwei, 2015). After the analysis, the new Cronbach alpha for the composite scale was .775 at a .05 alpha level. The scale was validated using construct validity in Iranian studies (Bayani, Mohammad, & Bayani, 2008). The correlation coefficient of Ryff's scale with satisfaction with life, happiness and self-esteem were found to be .47, .58 and .46 respectively which were significant ( $p < .001$ ).

### 3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Students' lists and records on admission were obtained from the headmaster's office. An introduction was made to the respondents and the study purpose was explained to them. Respondents were guided on how to complete the questionnaires. The researcher administered the questionnaires with the help of designated teachers to 357 respondents. Data for the study was gathered over three weeks. This enabled the questionnaire to be administered to all the students in the schools and the municipality. Questionnaires of 326 were retrieved representing 91.3% of the 357 questionnaires administered. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software (version 17) was employed to analyse the data.

**Table 2. Types of family cohesion**

Types of Family Cohesion	Item n	Item Cluster	Range
Balanced	7	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7	7-28
Disengaged	7	8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14	7-28
Enmeshed	7	15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21	7-28
Global score (FCS)	21		21-84

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Hypothesis One

A significant positive correlation will exist between family cohesion and psychological wellbeing. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used.

Results in Table 3 shows a significant positive correlation between family cohesion and psychological wellbeing among students ( $r = .250^{**}$ ,  $p = .003$ ). This implies that an increase in level or quality of family cohesion leads to an increase in psychological wellbeing.

### 4.2 Hypothesis Two

Male students will have higher levels of family cohesion than their female counterparts. An Independent sample t-test was used.

Table 4 shows that male students ( $M=154.26$ ,  $SD=22.24$ ) have significantly higher levels of family cohesion than female students ( $M=143.58$ ,  $SD=21.02$ ),  $t(183) = 3.383$ ,  $p = .001$ . This implies

that gender influences levels of family cohesion among students.

### 4.3 Hypothesis Three

Children whose parents who are married will have higher levels or quality family cohesion than those raised by separated, divorced and widowed parents. One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used.

The One-Way Analysis of Variance test was used to determine whether children whose parents are married have higher levels or quality of marital cohesion than those raised by separated, divorced and widowed parents in Table 5. Results show a significant difference between levels or quality of family cohesion experienced by students whose parents are married and those whose parents are separated, widowed and divorced ( $F(3, 181) = 5.699$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Multiple comparison results show that students whose parents are married have the highest quality of family cohesion, followed by those whose parents are separated, divorced and widowed respectively. By implication, children

**Table 3. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient test result on the correlation between family cohesion and psychological wellbeing**

Variables	M	SD	r	P
Family Cohesion	149.18	22.26	.250**	.003
Psychological Wellbeing	113.59	11.53		

**Table 4. Independent t test result on the levels of family cohesion between male and female students**

Gender	M	SD	Df	t	P
Male	154.36	22.24	183	3.383	.001
Female	143.58	21.02			

**Table 5. One-Way analysis of variance test result on the extent to which marital status predicts family cohesion**

Marital Status	M	SD	Df	F	P	MC
Married	154.63	21.98	3, 181	5.699	.001	4<3<2=1
Separated	144.42	18.66				
Divorced	141.68	19.39				
Widowed	138.50	24.29				
Total	149.18	22.26				

1= Married, 2=Separated, 3 = Divorced, 4 = Widowed

**Table 6. Independent t test result on the levels of family cohesion between students who live with their parents and those who do not live their parents**

Live with Both Parents	M	SD	df	T	P
Yes (live with parents)	155.14	21.94	183	3.836	.000
No (do not live with parents)	143.02	20.99			



raised by parents who are married have higher marital cohesion than those raised by separated, divorced and widowed parents.

#### 4.4 Hypothesis Four

Students who live with their parents will have higher levels of family cohesion than those who do not live with their parents.

Results in Table 6 shows that students who live with their parents ( $M=155.14$ ,  $SD=21.94$ ) have significantly higher levels quality of family cohesion than those who do not live with their parents ( $M=143.02$ ,  $SD=20.99$ ),  $t(183) = 3.386$ ,  $p = .000$ . This implies that with whom a student lives with influences the level or quality of family cohesion they experience.

### 5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 5.1 Relationship between Family Cohesion and Psychological Wellbeing

The study revealed a significant positive correlation between family cohesion and psychological wellbeing among students. This implies that an increase in level or quality of family cohesion leads to an increase in psychological wellbeing. This finding is reinforced by Olson (1991) Circumplex Model of Family Systems which argues that the nature of family cohesion within families influences the psychological health of members of that family (Olson, 1991). Based on this theory, a well-adjusted level of cohesion and flexibility are most conducive to healthy family functioning and enhances the psychological wellbeing of family members (Olson, 2011; Sanders, 2012). On the other hand, a family that has poor family cohesion and flexibility has psychologically distressed members (Olson, 2011; Sanders, 2012). This is so because family cohesion has to do with the emotional bonding or attachment that family members have toward one another (Olson, 1999). This implies that when there is a healthy or desirable family cohesion family members can understand and support themselves especially when any individual family member or the entire family is in crisis (Olson, 1999). As such, challenges or crisis do not persist for long to escalate into psychological distress (Olson, 1999). Similarly, Bowen's (1985) family systems theory also supports the finding which indicate that a rise in family

cohesion leads to an increase in the psychological wellbeing of its members (Bowen, 1985). According to this theory lack of cohesiveness within families increases the tendency or rise in anxiety, stress and depression (Brown, 1999). The psychological wellbeing of family members is enhanced when there is a reasonable level of proximity and affection between family members (Brown, 1999).

The attachment theory further explains why individuals within some families have high psychological wellbeing, whereas others have high psychological distress (Ainsworth et al., 1978). According to this theory a cohesive family is the one who consistently provides for the emotional and material needs of its members (Ainsworth et al., 1978). In such families, members grow to develop a secured attachment to the family. Secure attachment of an individual is characterised by trust, healthy psychological wellbeing, the ability to adapt to one's environment, among others (Malekpour, 2007). The implies that individuals who are securely attached to their families have healthier or higher psychological wellbeing levels (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Malekpour, 2007). On the contrary, families who are unable to consistently provide for the material and emotional needs of its family members end up producing family members who are insecurely attached to their family (Ainsworth et al., 1978). It could be said that the most desirable childhood attachment style is the secured attachment style because individuals who are securely attached have a higher tendency to develop a healthy psychological wellbeing and become fully functional members of society unlike their insecure counterparts. The attachment theory therefore reinforces the finding of this present study by indicating that family cohesion has a positive effect or impact on the psychological wellbeing of its members.

Herman et al. (2007) further state that cohesion within the family and building of supportive relationships is said to influence the development of healthy mental wellbeing among family members. Cummings et al. (2015) also argue that persistent conflict and misunderstanding within a family is correlated with insecurity, anxiety depression and aggressive behaviours and conduct disorder.

Moos and Moos (2002) also state that the environment within every family has a direct influence on the psychological wellbeing of family

members especially children. According to Deci and Ryan (1985), a family environment that is supportive, flexible and encourages autonomy brings about healthy psychological wellbeing among its members. Whereas, a family environment that is characterised with punishment, rigidity and neglect brings about unhealthy psychological wellbeing among its members (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Similarly, findings of Harris and Molock (2010) also had it that levels of family cohesion are significantly negatively correlated with higher psychological distress. Uruk et al. (2008) also state that family cohesion has a direct influence on the psychological wellbeing of its members. From the above discussion, it could be said, therefore, that following the findings of this present study, family cohesion is a major predictor of the psychological wellbeing of its members (Bagi & Kumar, 2014).

## **5.2 Sex Difference in Higher Levels of Family Cohesion**

The result showed that male students had higher levels of family cohesion than female students. This finding is inconsistent with Brown et al. (2015) who posit that males were high in terms of family cohesion than females

However, the finding contradicts that of Joao et al. (2015) who discovered that family cohesion influences female adolescent students more than their male counterparts (Joao, et al., 2015). This is so because female adolescents have a higher tendency to use social and family relationships as an avenue for self-disclosure, emotional intimacy, and support (Joao et al., 2015). Similarly, Schraedley, et al. (1999) further state that higher levels of cohesion with a family also have a strong influence on the extent to which females can live a life free of anxiety and depression. This implies that when a family becomes non-cohesive, its female members' tendency to become mentally distressed is relatively high. Females' mental wellbeing is relatively more dependent on their family relationships than their male counterparts especially during adolescence (Telzer & Fuligni, 2013). This is because in adolescence, girls have a higher tendency to identify more with their family and spend more time engaged in daily family leisure activities and familial communication than males. Joao et al., (2015) also state that females in general depend more on family and social relationships for greater emotional intimacy and support than their male

counterparts. Although the present study found males to be more influenced by family cohesion than females, related studies contradict with the finding. The difference in findings might have arisen as a result of cultural difference as argued by (Harris & Molock, 2010).

## **5.3 Students' Quality of Family Cohesion based on Parents' Marital Status**

The results showed a significant difference between levels or quality of family cohesion experienced by students whose parents are married and those whose parents are either separated, widowed and divorced. The results further indicated that students whose parents are married have the highest level or quality of family cohesion, followed by those whose parents are separated, divorced and widowed respectively. This implies that children raised by parents who are married have higher marital cohesion than those raised by separated, divorced and widowed parents.

The results reinforce other studies done in this research area such as Carlson and Corcora (2001). Carlson and Corcoran (2001) posit that the environment within which an individual is raised plays an important role in influencing their experience of cohesiveness. Specifically, children or young people who are raised by their biological parents within the same household have higher levels of family cohesiveness than those raised by those who are not their biological parents (Barimah et al., 2024; Carlson & Corcoran, 2001). Similarly, research finding of Stent (2014) indicates that the marital status of parents predicts the nature and level of family cohesion received by their children. This is so because divorce comes with a decline in resources, both before and after the divorce, which in turn disrupts the family system due to parental separation (Stent, 2014). Thus, divorce leads to a breakdown of family cohesion.

## **5.4 Students Who Live with their Parents will have Higher Levels of Family Cohesion than those who do not Live with their Parents**

The results showed that students who live with their parents have significantly higher levels of family cohesion than those who do not live with their parents. This, therefore, shows that who a student lives with influences the level of family cohesion they experience. The finding supports that of Bandhana and Sharma (2012) who posits

that the environment and living arrangement of individual influences an individual experience of family cohesion (Bandhana & Sharma, 2012). Similarly, the finding of Carlson and Corcoran (2001) also revealed that teenagers who lived with their biological parent's experienced higher levels of family cohesion than those who did not live with their biological parents. This is because the tendency to receive support emotionally and materially is relatively higher when the student is living with his or her biological parents than those who do not live with their biological parents.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The study investigated the relationship between family cohesion and psychological wellbeing of adolescents in the La-Nkwantanang Municipality in Accra. Findings showed that a significant positive correlation exist between family cohesion and psychological wellbeing among students. This implies that an increase in level or quality of family cohesion leads to an increase in psychological wellbeing of adolescents. Male students also reported significantly higher levels of family cohesion than female students. Similarly, a significant difference was found to exist between levels or quality of family cohesion experienced by students whose parents were married and those whose parents were either separated, widowed and divorced.

Specifically, students whose parents were married had the highest level or quality of family cohesion, followed by those whose parents were separated, divorced and widowed respectively. Thus, students raised by parents who were married had higher family cohesion than those raised by separated, divorced and widowed parents. Results revealed that students who lived with their parents had significantly higher levels or quality of family cohesion than those who did not live with their parents. Thus, who a student lives with influences the level or quality of family cohesion they experience. It is concluded that a significant positive correlation exists between family cohesion and psychological wellbeing among students. This suggests that an increase in level or quality of family cohesion leads to an increase in psychological wellbeing of adolescents in the La-Nkwantanang Municipality in Accra.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concluded that an increase in level or quality of family cohesion leads to an increase in

psychological wellbeing of adolescents. As a result of this finding, it is recommended that, resident senior high school Counsellors, Guidance and Counselling Psychologists in private practice, and Pastoral Counsellors should apply the findings when dealing with students with psychological health issues and behaviour problems. Specifically, counsellors should focus on family dynamics of psychologically distressed students (i.e. experience stress, anxiety and depression) and help families to be more cohesive. This is important because doing so will have a positive influence of the psychological wellbeing of students or adolescents.

Stakeholders such as Heads of schools, teachers and Counsellors should use Parent Teachers Association meetings to educate parents and families on the necessity and benefit of a good or a healthy family cohesion on the psychological wellbeing of students. Doing so will not only help enhance the psychological wellbeing of students, but also improve the academic performance of students in the long run. This is so because research has revealed that students who have a healthy psychological wellbeing have a higher tendency to perform better academically than their psychologically distressed counterparts. For instance, Chow (2007) discovered that students' psychological wellbeing has a direct influence on their academic performance.

The findings showed that student whose parents were married had higher family cohesion than those whose parents were either divorced, widowed or separated. It is therefore recommended that parents do whatever it takes to stay together as a married couple. This is important because it will go a long way to enhance and maintain a healthy psychological wellbeing among their children.

Furthermore, resident senior high school Counsellors, senior high school teachers, Guidance and Counselling Psychologists in private practice, and Pastoral Counsellors should give special attention to students who hail from broken or dysfunctional homes. This is important because such students have an increased propensity to be psychologically distressed and perform poorly at school.

It is further recommended that future studies use a larger sample size, sampled across various schools in different districts in Accra, and if possible, target students in different regions

across the country. This is important because doing so will enhance the generalizability of findings across the general population.

Students and professional researchers are also encouraged to do further studies in this research area to confirm this study's finding, and throw more light on the extent to which family cohesion influences the psychological wellbeing of students.

Other researchers should also consider adding more related variables such as family adaptability and academic performance. This will go a long way to determine the extent to which family cohesion, family adaptability and psychological wellbeing predicts the academic performance of adolescents in senior high schools in Ghana.

## DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Authors hereby declare that no generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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