



Explaining the Sense of Family Coherence among Adolescents

KULIK, L.

Abstract

The study examined the impact of two dimensions of family life on the sense of family coherence among Israeli adolescents ($n = 133$). The structural dimension was expressed in power relations between the adolescent's parents (as measured in equality in division of household tasks and equality in decision making). The dimension of interpersonal relations was expressed in perceived family conflict and parental support to their offspring. Parental support contributed most significantly to explaining the adolescents' sense of family coherence, followed by perceived family conflict. Equality in division of household tasks and in decision making were also found to correlate moderately with the adolescents' sense of family coherence. In general, the adolescents' sense of family coherence was high, parents were perceived as supportive, the level of perceived family conflict was low, and the division of household tasks and decision making were assessed as egalitarian.

Key Words: family coherence, adolescents, power relations, family conflict, parental support

Introduction

In the framework of development theories, adolescence is considered a stressful life stage, when individuals experience far-reaching changes which place considerable demands on adolescents as well as on their families (Smetana, 1995). Hence, researchers as well as practitioners have attempted to identify personal and environmental resources that mitigate stress and facilitate coping during this period of life. One construct that has been examined recently by researchers as a coping resource with various stressful situations is family coherence, which influences the individual's quality of life and diminishes the negative impact of stressful life events and crises (Lightburn & Pine, 1996; Pierce, 2001; Ransom, Fisher, & Terry, 1992; Sagy, 1998; Sagy & Dothan, 2001). Based on Antonovsky's (1987) concept of personal sense of coherence, the concept of sense of family coherence (henceforth SOFC) pertains mainly to elements of consistency in rules and norms, even-handedness in demands, and meaningful participation in collective family experiences. The importance of family coherence is highlighted by researchers who have found that in certain stressful situations, it is sometimes even more effective than personal sense of coherence (Antonovsky & Sourani, 1988).

For the most part, researchers have argued that the sense of family coherence can predict successful adjustment of individuals and families to stressful life situations, and mediates between stressors and adaptation. However, with very few exceptions (Friborg, Sorlie, & Rosenvinge, 2005), there is a lack of research on family coherence as an outcome variable. In an attempt to

fill this gap, the present study focused on the sources of perceived family coherence among adolescents. Because this resource is familial, the study sought to identify its sources in the family environment. For this purpose, we adopted two theoretical approaches. One theoretical framework adopted to explore the sources of family coherence among adolescents was aversion of the family system approach presented by Minuchin (1974). The relationships between overall family system functioning and development of a person's being, feelings, perceptions, and behavior are emphasized in current theoretical literature (Henry, Robinson, Neal, & Huey, 2006; Olson & Gorall, 2003) and practical literature (Cowan, Powell, & Cowan, 1998). Overall family system theory describes the "invisible web" of complex interaction patterns that regulate the day-to-day interactions between family members (Minuchin, 1974). In those contexts, research has shown that both overall family system functioning and parental behavior is positively related to adolescent well-being (Grotevant, 1998). This theoretical framework assumes that family members influence one another, and that their feelings, perceptions, and behaviors are interrelated – an approach that has been supported with regard to various situations, including the life stage of adolescence (Henry, Robinson, Neal, & Huey, 2006; Olson & Gorall, 2003). In order to explore the various impacts of the family environments on the individual, we adopted an additional theoretical framework, the ecological approach proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1995). This approach conceptualized how context shapes the relations between children's development and specific elements in the environment (e.g., individuals, objects, events, actions). According to Bronfenbrenner, the broader context in which families function determines the meaning that children attach to particular experiences. Recently, researchers have emphasized that family environment itself has context, that is, the specific experiences that children have within their homes influence their development (Bradley & Corwyn, 2000; Crouter, Manke, & McHale, 1995; Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Greenfield, 1994). Specifically, we examined the impact of variables belonging to two dimensions (contexts) of the family environment on the adolescents' SOFC.

Dimensions of Family Life

The two dimensions of family life examined in this study were the structural dimension and the dimension of interpersonal relations. Taken together, variables belonging to these dimensions provide a comprehensive picture of the adolescents' family environment.

The structural dimension. According to the classical structural-functionalist approach, people behave inside of contexts shaped by the social structure, which are relatively stable patterns of social behavior (Merton, 1968). The key concepts that define social structure are social status and roles. In the family context, marital power relations are indicators of the spouses' family status and roles, and therefore they define the structural dimension of the family life in the present study. Marital power relations are examined on the basis of two measures – division of household tasks, and decision-making – which are the predominant measures cited in the research literature on marital power relations. The rationale for using these variables to evaluate marital relations is based on the classic Blood and Wolfe's (1960) resource theory, which was found to be valid today (Kulik & Zuckerman-Bareli, 1997) despite the changes in gender roles witnessed by the contemporary era. Regarding division of household tasks, research theory assumes that both men and women consider housework an undesirable task, and that the partner with more resources will therefore engage in negotiations in an attempt to be relieved of the responsibility for housework (Brines, 1993). Decision-making power, the second aspect examined here to evaluate marital power relations, is determined according to the spouse that makes major decisions in the household. The tendency to give decision-making power to one partner or both partners is largely determined by social norms, as well as by the amount of resources available to each partner, and by the extent to which each partner is knowledgeable about the issue at hand (Kurdek, 1993; Reiss & Webster, 2004). Research findings have revealed that equality in division of household tasks and in decision making are related to marital

quality, and that dissatisfaction arises when relationships are inequitable, that is, when people feel that they under-benefit or over-benefit from social interactions (Kulik, 2004; Spitze, 1988). Moreover, contemporary scholars argue that egalitarian marriages are characterized by affection, empathy, and time devoted to intimacy, which enhance the quality and stability of the marital relationship (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003). Conversely, many studies support the notion that low marital quality (indicated by an unequal marital relationship) is linked with increased conflict in interactions with children (Grych & Fincham, 1990; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). Based on these findings, and since equality in marital power relations affects the children's well-being, it can be expected that when parents experience a high quality of marital life as expressed in division of household chores and decision-making patterns, there will be a sense of consistency, order, and manageability in the home environment, which are the components of SOFC.

Interpersonal relations. This dimension was evaluated on the basis of two aspects: the extent of conflict in the family, and the parental support provided to offspring. Family conflict, which is one aspect of family climate (Moos & Moos, 1981), reflecting the degree of anger, aggression, and discord among family members on major issues of concern. Research findings have revealed that when a child experiences a high level of conflict in the family, there is likely to be continuous arousal of negative emotional states (Monahan, Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1993). The functionalist perspective of emotion regulation suggests that high levels of exposure to family conflict are also likely to moderate children's responses to other experiences and encounters within the family environment.

As for the second aspect of interpersonal relations examined here, parental support to their offspring, findings indicate that parental support tends to be positively related to aspects of adolescent well-being, such as general competence (Amato, 1989), identity achievement, and family life satisfaction (Sartor & Youniss, 2002). In addition, parental support was found to correlate negatively with eating disorders (McVey, Pepler, Davis, Flett, & Abdolell, 2002), as well as depressed affect (Whitbeck, Conger, & Kao, 1993). The basic assumption underlying the present study is that good relations between family members as expressed in low levels of conflict and high levels of parental support may enable adolescents to develop a sense of stability, order, and manageability, which are the main components of SOFC.

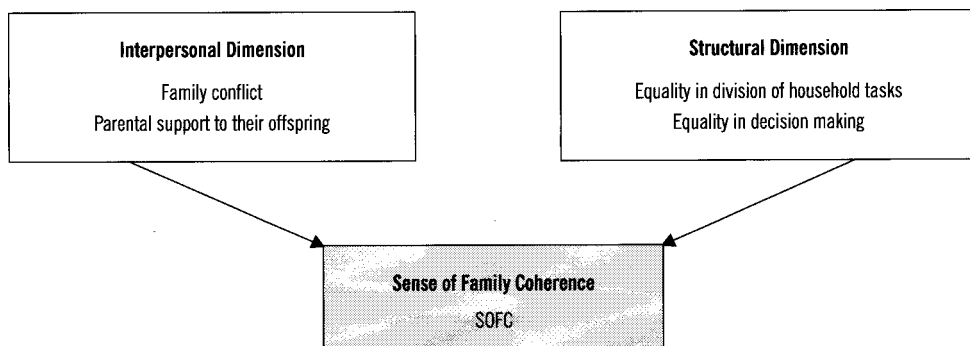


Figure 1
The research variables

Research Goals and Main Research Hypotheses

The main goal of the present study was to examine two aspects of family life as perceived by adolescents (power relations between parents, extent of family conflict, and parental support),

and their relationship to SOFC. In these general contexts, we examined the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. The more equal parental power relations (as expressed in an egalitarian division of household tasks and equality in decision making), the higher the adolescents' SOFC will be.

Hypothesis 2. The lower the level of perceived family conflict, the higher the adolescents' SOFC will be.

Hypothesis 3. The more supportive the parents are, the higher the adolescents' SOFC will be.

In addition, the study aimed to examine the general contribution of variables in the family environment (as reflected in equality in division of household tasks, equality in decision making, family conflict, and parental support) to explaining the adolescents' SOFC.

Method

Sample

The research sample comprised 133 Israeli adolescents (60 boys and 73 girls), belonging to two-parent families. Each participant came from a different family; any siblings were excluded from the final sample. The mean age of the participants was 16.1 ($SD = 1.5$), and all of them were enrolled in high school (9th-11th grades). Almost all of the participants (92%) were Israeli-born. Regarding origin by self-definition, 42% defined themselves as *Mizrahim* (Asian-African), 34.6% defined themselves as *Ashkenazim* (European-American), and 22.6% defined themselves as mixed origin (i.e., one parent *Mizrahi* and the other *Ashkenazi*). At the time of the study, both parents were employed. Regarding parents' background, the mean age of the fathers was 49.0 ($SD = 5.4$), and the mean age of the mothers was 45.8 ($SD = 4.9$). As for level of education, 45.8% of the fathers were high school graduates, and 54.2% had some post-secondary education (academic or other). The comparable figures among the mothers were 45.8% and 54.2%, respectively.

Variables and Research Instruments

Sociodemographic background. The questionnaire included basic items on the family's background.

Family coherence. This variable was evaluated on the basis of the Family Coherence Scale adapted by Sagy (1998) from the original questionnaire developed by Antonovsky (1993), which measured participants' personal sense of coherence. The instrument used in this study consisted of 12 items that examined the extent to which participants perceived the family unit as having an orderly and manageable structure (e.g., "has a family member you relied on disappointed you?"). Responses were based on a 7-point scale, which was formulated such that higher scores reflected higher levels of family coherence. The questionnaire was found to distinguish between children who were abused by their parents and those who were not (Dothan, 1996). In this study, the Cronbach's Alpha reliability value for the questionnaire was .85. One score was derived by calculating the mean of the items on the questionnaire.

The structural dimension was reflected in perceptions of marital power relations, which were evaluated on the basis of two measures: division of household tasks and decision-making.

a. *Division of household tasks.* The original questionnaire was developed by Ichilov and Rubineck (1978), and included 11 items. The questionnaire was re-designed for the present study, and some of the items that correlated highly with each other were combined. In addition, after adding some items that reflect the division of household tasks in the family today, the final questionnaire used in the present study included 12 items. For each item, participants were

asked to indicate who does most of the work at home, such as grocery shopping, cooking, and household repairs. Responses were based on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 ("father always") to 5 ("mother always"). In the data analysis stage, the items on the original questionnaire were recoded to reflect the extent of equality in household tasks, as follows:

Endpoint 1 on the original scale ("father always") combined with endpoint 5 ("mother always") = 1 (totally unequal division of household tasks).

Point 2 ("father sometimes") combined with point 4 ("mother sometimes") = 2 ("somewhat egalitarian division of household tasks").

Midpoint 3 on the original questionnaire remained the same, and indicated "egalitarian division of household tasks." The method employed in the present study to create a measurement, which reflects the extent of equality in household division by recoding a questionnaire that assessed the household division using a 5-point scale, was validated in previous studies (Kulik & Rayyan, 2006). One score was derived for the entire questionnaire by computing the mean of the items on the new 3-point scale: the higher the score, the more the division of household tasks was perceived as egalitarian. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability of the questionnaire used in the study was .86.

b. *Decision-making.* A 10-item questionnaire developed by Katz (1980) was used to evaluate which partner makes major decisions in the home. In a later study, Kulik (2002) used the same questionnaire, and reported a correlation between dominance in decision-making and the amount of resources available to each partner. In the original questionnaire, responses were based on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 ("husband always") to 5 ("wife always"), for example, "who decides about major purchases in your household?" In the data analysis stage, the items on the original scale of the instrument were recoded to reflect the quality of decision-making patterns in the home, as follows:

Endpoint 1 in the original scale ("father always decides") combined with endpoint 5 ("mother always decides") = 1 (non-egalitarian decision making).

Point 2 ("mother usually decides") combined with point 4 ("mother usually decides") = 2 (somewhat non-egalitarian).

Midpoint 3 remained the same and represented equality in decision making. The method employed in the present study to create a measurement that reflects the extent of equality in decision making was validated in previous studies (Kulik, 2004).

One score was derived by computing the means of all items: higher scores represented more egalitarian decision-making patterns.

The interpersonal relations dimension was reflected in the extent of perceived family conflict and in the extent of parental support to their offspring.

a. *Family conflict* was evaluated on the basis of one scale from the Family Environment Questionnaire (Moos & Moos, 1981). The perceived family conflict scale used in this study included 18 items, which examined the extent of anger, aggression, and struggles in the family (e.g., "there is very little cooperation among members of my family"). Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which each item reflects their evaluation of the level of perceived conflict in their families on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (to a great extent) to 5 (not at all). One score was derived by calculating the mean of the items on the questionnaire: the higher the score, the higher the level of perceived conflict in the family. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability value for the questionnaire in the present study was .78.

b. *Parental support* was assessed on the basis of the 10 items taken from Guidubaldi and Cleminshaw's (1985) questionnaire, which were translated into Hebrew and adapted by Alex (1994) to examine adolescents' evaluations of parental support. Each item was presented separately for evaluating the extent of support the adolescent received from his or her mother and father (e.g., "I feel that my mother/father is too critical of me"). The Cronbach's Alpha reliability values of the questionnaire were .85 for mother's evaluation as supportive and .87 for father's evaluation as supportive. Because the mothers' and fathers' levels of support were found to correlate highly with each other ($r = .78, p < .001$), and because no differences were found between the means of maternal and paternal support as evaluated by the adoles-

cents, one score was derived by calculating the mean of the fathers' and mothers' scores to represent general parental level of support: the higher the scores, the more supportive the parents.

Data Collection

Data were collected in 2003 and 2004 by 10 research assistants as part of a large research project on contemporary families, conducted at a university in Israel. The sample was drawn from members of youth groups at community centers in the northern, central, and southern regions of the country. Although a large portion of Israelis adolescents visit community centers, the sample of the present study should be considered a convenience sample. The adolescents filled out the questionnaires at the community centers after their group activities. About 20 minutes were allocated to fill out the questionnaires. The response rate was approximately 85%.

Data Analysis

To examine relationships between the explanatory variables (i.e., the variables belonging to the two family dimensions) and sense of family coherence, Pearson correlations were carried out. In addition, ANOVAs were conducted to examine differences in the sense of family coherence among the adolescents according to gender and ethnic origin (*Mizrahi*, *Askenazi*, and "mixed origin"). Finally, to examine the combined contribution of the research variables to explaining the adolescents' sense of family coherence, stepwise regression analysis was carried out.

Results

Profile of the Research Variables

The level of perceived family coherence among the adolescents was found to be high ($M = 4.83$, $SD = .76$), that is, above midpoint 4.00 on a 7-point scale (see Table 1). The adolescents perceived the division of household tasks and decision-making in their family as egalitarian ($M = 2.46$, $SD = .35$, $M = 2.25$, $SD = .33$, respectively), that is, above midpoint 2.00 on the revised 3-point scale. Perceived level of family conflict was low ($M = 2.09$, $SD = 0.51$), that is, below midpoint 3 on the 5-point scale, and parental support was perceived as high on a 6-point scale ($M = 4.60$, $SD = .85$).

Table 1
Description of the Research Variables (N = 133)

Variables	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Scale
1 Family coherence	4.83	.76	1.38	5.91	1-7
2 Family conflict	2.09	.51	2.14	5.00	1-5
3 Equality in household tasks	2.46	.35	1.33	3.00	1-3
4 Equality in decision making	2.25	.35	1.11	3.00	1-3
5 Parental support	4.60	.85	2.20	6.00	1-6

Correlations between the Research Variables (Hypotheses 1-4)

Table 2 presents the correlations between the research variables. Sense of family coherence correlated negatively with age: the older the adolescents, the lower their SOFC (see Table 2). In addition, high positive correlations were found between SOFC and parental support. In contrast, the higher the perceived level of family conflict, the lower the adolescent's SOFC. The adolescents' SOFC correlated positively with equality in division of household tasks and in decision making: the higher the equality in division of household tasks and in decision making, the stronger the adolescents' SOFC. Another significant and negative correlation was found between perceived family conflict and parental support: the higher the level of family conflict, the lower the level of parental support. In addition, a low but significant correlation was found between ages and perceived family conflict: the older the adolescents, the higher the levels of perceived family conflict. Moreover, a low but significant negative correlation was found between perceived conflict and equality in division of household tasks: the higher the perceived level of family conflict, the lower the level of equality in division of household tasks. Finally, a moderate and significant positive correlation was revealed between equality in division of household tasks and equality in decision making: the more egalitarian the division of household tasks, the higher the level of equality in decision-making patterns. In addition, ANOVAs performed for ethnic origin (*Mizrahim*, *Ashkenazim*, and mixed) revealed no significant differences with regard to SOFC. However, borderline differences were found between boys and girls ($M = 4.74$, $SD = .72$; and $M = 4.87$, $SD = .73$, respectively). Girls tended to express higher levels of SOFC than did boys.

Table 2
Pearson's Correlations between the Research Variables (N = 133)

	1 Family coherence	2 Age	3 Parental support	4 Family conflict	5 Equality in household tasks	6 Equality in decision making
1	—	-.12*	.54 ***	-.59***	.24**	.16*
2	—	—	.05	-.15*	-.03	-.02
3	—	—	—	-.57***	.09	.06
4	—	—	—	—	-.16*	.03
5	—	—	—	—	—	.47***
6	—	—	—	—	—	—

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

The Combined Contribution of the Research Variables to Explaining Sense of Family Coherence

To examine the combined contribution of the different family dimensions to explaining the adolescents' SOFC, stepwise hierarchical regression was conducted.

In the first step, the participant's age and gender (1 = boys; 2 = girls) were entered. We entered variables in the first step of the regression analysis in order to parcel out their impact from the variables that were entered later in the regression equation. Notably, because ethnic

origin did not have a significant relationship with SOFC, it was not entered into the regression equation. The variables that reflect the interpersonal dimension, parental support, and perceived family conflict were entered in the second step. In the third step variables belonging to the structural dimension, equality in household tasks and decision making, were added to the regression equation. We entered the research variables in this order in an attempt to parcel out the impact of the interpersonal variables from the power relations variables, because of the potential overlapping between these variables and those reflecting interpersonal relations. In previous analysis using ANOVAs we examined whether there is a significant interaction between the different variables representing the dimensions studied. However, with the exception of the interaction between perceived family conflict and equality in household division, no significant interaction was found between the research variables examined. Thus in order to investigate whether this interaction makes a significant contribution to explaining SOFC, this interaction was entered in the fourth step.

Table 3
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses of Family Coherence Variables (N = 133)

	B	SEB	β	R ²	ΔR^2
Step 1					
Age	-.07	.74	-.14*	.04*	.04*
Gender	.24	.04	.16*		
Step 2					
Age	-.04	.03	-.09	.43***	.39***
Gender	.14	.10	.09		
Parental support	.28	.07	.33***		
Family conflict	-.58	.12	-.39***		
Step 3					
Age	.04	.03	.09	.46***	.03*
Gender	.16	.10	.10		
Parental support style	.27	.07	.32***		
Family conflict	-.55	.12	-.37***		
Equality in household tasks	.02	.01	.13*		
Equality in decision making	.14	.17	.06		
Step 4					
Age	-.05	.03	-.10	.51***	.05*
Gender	.14	.10	.09		
Parental support	.25	.07	.28***		
Family Conflict	-.56	.12	-.38***		
Equality in household tasks	.00	.01	.03		
Equality in decision making	.17	.16	.17		
Family conflict x equality in decision making	-.17	.05	-.24***		

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Taken together, all of the independent research variables accounted for 51% of the variance in SOFC. The sociodemographic variables entered in the first step explained 4% of the variance, and both age and gender contributed significantly. Beta coefficients indicate that the older the

adolescents, the lower their SOFC. As for impact of gender, SOFC was stronger among the adolescent girls than among the boys. Parental support and perceived family conflict explained an additional 39% of the variance, over and above the percentage explained by sociodemographic variables. Beta coefficients indicated that the greater the extent of perceived parental support, the higher the adolescent's SOFC. In contrast, the higher the level of perceived family conflict, the lower the adolescent's SOFC. In the second step, after entering the interpersonal variables, the impact of age was no longer significant. Power relations (equality in division of household tasks and in decision-making) explained an additional 3% of the variance in SOFC. However, the Beta coefficient revealed a significant effect only for equality in division of household tasks, and not for equality in decision making: the higher the level of perceived equality in division of household tasks, the stronger the adolescents' SOFC. Finally, the interactions entered in the fifth step (family conflict x equality in decision making) explained an additional 5% of the variance in the adolescents' SOFC.

To identify the sources of the interaction, the research sample was divided according to the median score for equality in division of household tasks. In this way, two groups were obtained: the high equality group and the low equality group. Pearson correlations between perceived family conflict and SOFC were calculated for each of the groups. The analysis revealed a high negative correlation between the two variables among adolescents in the "low equality" group ($r = -.77, p < .000$), and a moderate significant correlation among those in the "high equality" group ($r = -.34, p < .01$).

Discussion

The main goal of this study was to examine the sources of perceived family coherence among adolescents in Israel. Before dealing with each of the research hypotheses, several of the main findings of the study warrant discussion. The adolescents perceived the family as a harmonious and tranquil setting, as reflected in high SOFC, egalitarian parental power relations (i.e., equal division of household tasks), evaluation of parents as supportive and low levels of perceived family conflict. In addition, the strong relationship found between the adolescents' perceptions of parental support might also reflect a cohesive family climate. This finding would seem to contradict the accepted view that adolescence is a turbulent period characterized by considerable conflict in the home. There are two possible explanations for the harmonious climate revealed by the adolescents in the present study. One relates to the context of Israeli society, where the study was conducted. Although Israel has been strongly influenced by post-modern trends, it maintains a traditional familistic orientation (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 1999), and despite their increase in recent years, divorce rates are still lower than in Western countries (Lavee & Katz, 2003). Another indicator of the familistic orientation of Israeli society is that most Israelis marry, and very few couples choose to refrain from having children. Hence, it is possible that the adolescents participating in this study reported a harmonious family climate in keeping with the prevailing norms of family life in Israeli society.

Another explanation is that contrary to the beliefs of the general public, and contrary to reports in the media (Holmbeck & Hill, 1991), little empirical support exists for the contention that parent-adolescent relationships are characterized by an extreme level of conflict engagement (Laursen & Collins, 1994; Offer & Schonert-Reichl, 1992). Thus, it is possible that a combination of the above two arguments (i.e., the familistic context of Israeli society, and a more moderate interpretation of the view that adolescence is a conflicted period) would explain the harmonious character of family life reported by the participants in this study.

Regarding the specific research hypotheses, the findings confirmed the correlation between egalitarian power relations among the parents – especially in the context of household tasks and to a lesser extent in the area of decision making – and the adolescents' SOFC (partially confirming Hypothesis 1). Many researchers view power relations as a key variable that affects

marital quality (Erel & Burman, 1995). In the same vein, there is research evidence that an inequitable division of parental and family roles is related to poor socioemotional adjustment among children. Thus, children from traditional dual-earner families with an unequal division of tasks have been found to be more anxious and depressed, and to rate themselves lower in terms of social adjustment measures than children from families characterized by an equitable division of parental work and family roles do (McHale, Crouter, & Bartko, 1991). A possible explanation of the results regarding the measures of power relations examined, which indicate that equality in household division of labor better explains SOFC among adolescents than equality in decision making does, is related to the different character of the two measures. The measure of decision making reflects mainly the latent and less visible aspect of power relations, which is not always known to the adolescent, in contrast to division of household tasks, which reflects the pragmatic aspect of power relations. Since household tasks are more visible to the adolescents, it is reasonable to assume that this measure will have greater impact on their sense of family coherence than equality in decision making does.

In addition, it was found that low levels of family conflict are related to high SOFC among adolescents (confirming Hypothesis 2). This result is supported by other studies, which have found that a high level of family conflict is related to maladjustment among adolescents (Bradley & Corwyn, 2000; Montemayor, 1986). The findings of this study indicate that besides the direct contribution of family conflict levels to explaining the adolescents' SOFC, the contribution of family conflict is also expressed in its interaction with equality in division of household tasks. In families where the division of tasks among parents is unequal, levels of family conflict contributed more to explaining the adolescents' SOFC than in families with an equal division of household tasks. Therefore, it can be argued that the impact of family conflict on the adolescents' SOFC varies in different family environments. Evidently, unequal power relations among parents exacerbate the children's sense of insecurity, and the negative impact of family conflict on the adolescent's SOFC in that climate is particularly strong, as expected. Regarding parental support, the findings revealed that the more supportive the parents are, the higher the adolescents' SOFC (confirming Hypothesis 3). Essentially, supportiveness contributed more than any of the other variables to explaining the adolescents' SOFC. In this vein, other research findings revealed that parents who are able to create a responsive and warm family environment where there are clear expectations for mature behavior tend to have very well-adjusted offspring (Holmbeck, Paikoff, & Brooks-Gunn, 1995).

Besides the contribution of the variables examined to explaining the adolescents' sense of family coherence, it is important to note the negative correlation found between the participants' age and SOFC. A possible explanation of this finding is related to the process of separation from parents among older adolescents, during which they may develop more critical views regarding family life, as expressed in a lower level of SOFC than among the younger adolescents in the study.

Limitations of the Study and Recommendations

Before concluding, some limitations of the study should be noted. First, the research focused on perceptions of family coherence among youth in the middle stage of adolescence. To enhance the generalizability of the research findings, it would be worthwhile to compare perceptions of family life among youth at different stages of adolescence.

Another limitation of the study is related to the representativeness of the sample. As noted, the data were collected in youth community centers. Although a large portion of Israeli youth visit these centers regularly, it would be fair to consider the research sample as a convenience sample. Therefore, it is difficult to generalize the findings to the entire population of Israeli adolescents. In order to overcome this limitation, future studies should try to reach more representative samples of the adolescent population.

Finally, the present research is a one-time correlation study based completely on self-report by adolescents. Thus, great caution should be exercised in drawing conclusions about causal relations between the explanatory variables examined. For example, does equal division of labor lead to improved coherence or does a coherent family system increase the likelihood of sharing tasks? In an attempt to better examine causal relations between the explanatory variables and SOFC, future research should employ longitudinal designs that examine the explanatory variables and the development of sense of family coherence over time.

Implications of the Research

The research findings elicit some practical recommendations for professionals working with adolescents and their families. First, it is important to help parents realize the importance of spousal equality. In addition to its contribution to improving the quality of marital relations, spousal equality evidently helps foster a sense of family coherence in adolescent offspring. Moreover, the findings highlight the importance of adopting a supportive family atmosphere characterized by understanding and cooperation among family members. In light of these results, emphasis on these aspects of family life can be considered a worthwhile parental investment in developing resilience among their children.

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Authors note

Liat Kulik

associate professor

School of Social Work

Bar Ilan University

Ramat Gan

Address for Correspondence:

Dr. Liat Kulik

School of Social Work

Bar Ilan University

Ramat Gan

ISRAEL

Fax (School of Social Work): 972-3-5347228

e-mail: kulik@mail.biu.ac.il