

# Family system of adolescents in the district of Bosa in Bogota, Colombia

## Sistema familiar de los adolescentes de la localidad de Bosa en Bogotá, Colombia

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### SUMMARY

**Introduction:** The family is a structure of units linked by rules and dynamic functions that constantly interact and exchange with different external contexts. The family is a primary institution of socialization; this group influences the behavior of its members through external and internal stimuli. The way it is organized and structured accounts for the experiences of its members. The study aimed to analyze the family systems of adolescents in the locality of Bosa, in Bogotá, Colombia. **Materials and methods:** A quantitative, descriptive, cross-sectional study was conducted with the participation of 205 adolescents from the Brasilia

Bosa Educational Institution, to whom the Family System Questionnaire (FACES) was administered. The data were analyzed using SPSS version 25. **Results:** The participants' view of authority in the family is disordered and chaotic, meaning that it is a family nucleus in which it is not possible to identify who represents authority, nor is it actively assumed by any of the members. Although a pattern of authority is not clearly perceived, the participants interpret a powerful bond between family members. **Conclusion:** There is unity among the families of the participants. However, a pattern of authority is not perceived; the students interpret a powerful bond among the members of the family, which is built from the bonds of affection and solidarity with the different members of the family; this is a very important resource because it strengthens the cohesion of the family group in times of crisis and becomes a protective factor.

**Keywords:** Family system, family cohesion and adaptability, family satisfaction, adolescents.

### RESUMEN

**Introducción:** La familia es una estructura de unidades vinculadas por reglas y funciones dinámicas que están interactuando constantemente y en intercambio con los diferentes contextos externos, la familia es una institución primaria de socialización, este grupo influye en el comportamiento de sus integrantes, por medio de estímulos externos e internos; la forma como se organiza y estructura dan cuenta de la experiencia de sus miembros. El estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar el sistema familiar de adolescentes de la localidad de

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*Bosa en Bogotá, Colombia. **Materiales y métodos:** Se llevó a cabo un estudio cuantitativo de tipo descriptivo y corte transversal en el que participaron 205 adolescentes de la Institución Educativa Brasilia Bosa a los que se les aplicó el Cuestionario de Sistema Familiar (FACES), la información se analizó a través del software SPSS versión 25. **Resultados:** En los participantes existe una visión sobre la autoridad en la familia desordenada y caótica, es decir, que se trata de un núcleo familiar en el cual no es posible identificar quién o quiénes representan autoridad, y tampoco se asume de manera activa por algunos de los miembros. Aunque no se percibe claramente un patrón de autoridad, los participantes interpretan un vínculo muy fuerte entre los miembros de la familia. **Conclusión:** Existe unidad entre los miembros de las familias de los participantes, aunque no se perciba un patrón de autoridad, los estudiantes interpretan un vínculo muy fuerte entre los miembros de la familia, la cual se construye a partir de los vínculos afectivos y de solidaridad con los diferentes integrantes de la familia, siendo este un recurso muy importante porque fortalece la cohesión del grupo familiar en los momentos de crisis y se convierte en un factor protector.*

**Palabras clave:** Sistema familiar, cohesión y adaptabilidad familiar, satisfacción familiar, adolescentes.

## INTRODUCTION

The family is the first institution of socialization in every human being. Therefore, parental figures are transmitters of culture, i.e., they are the primary agents of socialization, and they are also responsible for filtering the impact of other social institutions. According to the way the family is organized, i.e., the number of members, roles are assigned according to gender, socio-economic situation, peculiarities of interactions, and customs among the members (1).

From systemic psychology, the family should be organized according to the following parameters: rules, which establish how the family is structured, seeking to preserve balance; hierarchy, where the members organize different levels of authority and power, which can be determined by cultural traditions, myths or rituals that the family system has; subsystem: according to the way it is organised, these are the elements that make up the system. Subsystems are identified as individual, conjugal, parental, and fraternal; their limits are that they can be present

externally or internally between the subsystems, and they allow for change in relation to the other subsystems (1). Therefore, they must be clear and change over time.

From the systemic approach, different forms of family are identified among them: the dispersed family, pre-dominance of individuality, lack of group identity, roles that are played in isolation, descriptive communication, each member has their own values and norms, poor affective commitment is perceived; separated family, the system submits to one person who is almost always the father, relationships are imposed, dominance of the role exercised by the father, obsessive, they tend towards a symbiotic union, the father takes care of the sons and the mother takes care of the daughters, with obsessive tendencies (2-6).

There are also other forms of the family, such as the connected family, and there is harmony between family members, roles are flexible, there is a dialogue that invites change, forces are united for the solution of individual and family problems, attitudes are democratic; therefore, it is integrated; agglutinated family, in which the members live excessively amalgamated not only physically but also ideologically, stereotyped relationships, the role of the mother is very important, predominance of concrete messages, rigid structure (7-9)

Bearing in mind that the family is one of the most important institutions in society. Its purposes are the protection of the system and adaptation to a culture where customs are transmitted; it can be affirmed that knowing the family is important for understanding the individual and his or her behavior. According to Aguilar (10), the family must be organized in a functional way that allows for the development of its members by establishing appropriate family ties and relationships.

In this sense, there is a variety of studies that account for the impact of the family context and its dynamics on the development of violent behavior in adolescents. Under this logic, some research defines middle childhood as a stage in which temperament maintains a moderating role of family contexts in relation to the development of aggression; in the same way, the results of the study agree that the authoritarian parenting

style forms children within strict and rigid parameters that do not allow flexibility and creativity, generating problems of self-esteem, poor interpersonal skills and inadequate strategies to resolve conflicts, poor academic results and difficulties in the internalization of rules (11).

It has been identified that family conflict probably has a negative effect on the development of adolescent autonomy and academic performance or has an impact on behavior. Under this logic, some authors have identified the positive or negative impact that conflicts can have on parental-filial relationships and the well-being experienced by adolescents, highlighting the importance of family cohesion and the flexibility of the family system in this context. Luna Bernal (12) identified that the most frequent and intense conflict issues are domestic chores and collaboration, time to go home, studying, and grades. The results indicate that family cohesion and flexibility were moderate, associated with low- to moderate-intensity problems within families.

The results indicate that an increase in family cohesion and a decrease in conflicts with parental figures are associated with increased family satisfaction among adolescents. Conversely, a reduction in family cohesion and an increase in conflicts can predict a decrease in family satisfaction. Thus, the relevance of attachment in the family and emotional development during adolescence, as well as the importance of moderate family cohesion, is a condition that prevents parental conflicts from significantly affecting adolescents' satisfaction with their family life (12).

Therefore, in the process of comprehensive adolescent development, it is important to guide the study to family models that allow us to identify what may affect communication, the exercise of authority, family cohesion, coping with difficulties, values, and satisfaction with family life; since every family group has internal dynamics, i.e., the context and dynamics that are created, and external interaction that refers to the relationship of the family with the social environment (13).

Family dynamics and parental styles have a significant impact on the way young people identify themselves. Democratic families

facilitate the expression of diverse points of view and decision-making, which makes it easier for adolescents to develop a positive identity, as opposed to authoritarian families, where individuals may find it more challenging to achieve this (14). The family is the central nucleus of humanity, given its important roles. Therefore, the family nucleus is the sphere of personal development, value consolidation, and social learning, and it has the legal and moral responsibility of being the guarantor of children's and adolescents' rights, thereby promoting the integral growth of its members across various life stages (15).

The above allows us to infer that social and institutional dynamics, as well as experiences within the family environment, are factors that influence the areas of adjustment for each family member. Similarly, at the Brasilia School located in the Bosa area of the Colombian capital, it is observed that adolescents are immersed in conflictive social and family contexts that are not very favorable for their individual development, affecting their academic performance, which leads to the formation of traces of dissatisfaction, exclusion, and social marginalization that are the causes of the development of delinquency and victimization in society. Hence, there is an interest in studying the family systems (cohesion and adaptability) of adolescents enrolled in this institution. The purpose of the study was to evaluate family cohesion and adaptability among students aged 13 to 18 years at the Brasilia Bosa Educational Institution in Bogota, Colombia.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed a non-experimental, quantitative, descriptive, and cross-sectional design.

Stratified random sampling was employed, stratifying the sample according to specific variables of interest. Students were selected from the eighth, ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades, with ages ranging from 13 to 18 years old. Once the sample size was calculated, it was divided proportionally among the different strata defined in the population. The ages of the ninth-grade students ranged from 14 to 15 years old, the tenth-

grade students ranged from 15 to 16 years old, and the eleventh-grade students ranged from 17 to 18 years old. When the sample size was calculated for a population of 422 students enrolled in the Brasilia Bosa Educational Institution, the sample size was 205, with a 5 % margin of error and a 95 % reliability.

To evaluate the family system, the Family System Evaluation Questionnaire designed by Olson, Portner and Lavee was used (16). The instrument was adapted by the Lisis Group of the University of Valencia, Faculty of Psychology, and consists of 20 items. It can be administered individually or collectively, takes 10 minutes, and is aimed at a population of all ages, starting from 12 years old.

### Coding

This questionnaire assesses two dimensions: I. Emotional attachment (items 1,3,5,7,9,11,13,15,17,19) and II. Flexibility (items 2,4,6,8,10,12,14,16,18,20). To obtain the score in each dimension, the scores from the items corresponding to both dimensions are summed. Dimension I assesses the following sub-dimensions: Unity (items 1, 11, 17, 19); Boundaries (items 5 and 7); Friendships and Time (items 3 and 9); and Leisure (items 13 and 15).

Dimension II assesses leadership (items 2, 6, 12, 18), Discipline (items 4 and 10), and rules and roles (items 8, 14, 16, and 20).

### Psychometric properties

**Reliability:** The overall scale's reliability, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, is 0.83. The alpha values for the attachment scale and flexibility scale are 0.81 and 0.65, respectively. **Validity:** Discriminates between sexes in the sense that boys perceive lower levels of family functioning while also desire lower levels of family functioning than girls. It also discriminates according to age in the sense that younger children perceive and desire higher levels of family functioning.

To carry out the study, permission was requested from the academic authorities of the Brasilia Bosa Educational Institution, who were

informed of the proposal and approved their participation; information was requested to contact parents, present the project, and request permission for their children to participate in the study, a meeting was scheduled with the parents. The scope of the project was explained to them, including the instrument that would be used with their children and the ethical considerations for studies involving humans. Once the parents' permission was obtained and they had signed the informed consent form, the project was introduced to the students, and the instrument was administered in groups to the students who had signed the form until the established sample of 205 students was reached.

Once the instruments were applied, it was verified in the presence of the students that all the questions had been answered.

### Data analysis

The database was organized in Excel for processing in SPSS Version 25 software. The results were presented in tables, graphs, and figures, along with frequency, percentages, and descriptive statistics, including minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation.

### Ethical aspects

Ethical considerations were taken into account when collecting information, in accordance with Resolution 8430 of 1993 of the Ministry of Health and Law 1090 of 2006, which regulates the practice of Psychology in Colombia. That is, ethical aspects were considered to ensure voluntary participation and the confidentiality of the information.

## RESULTS

The participants belonged to the eighth, ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades of high school, with a higher representation of ninth-grade students. The ages of the participants ranged from 13 to 18 years old, with a mean age of 15.19 years and a standard deviation of 2 years.

### Analysis of family functioning

To determine the level of family functioning perceived by the participants, the FACES III test was administered, which enables the assessment of this variable through a set of items referring to everyday family situations. A descriptive analysis of the items that comprise the entire scale was conducted to identify specific aspects of the participants' perceptions. In this respect, it was possible to determine that the items with the lowest scores corresponded to items 6 and 18, the former referring to the positive perception of the role that some family members can assume as

authority and the latter corresponding to exactly the same construct.

This suggests that the participants' view of authority in the family is disordered and possibly chaotic, i.e., it is a family nucleus in which it is not possible to identify who represents authority, nor do some of the members actively assume it. On the contrary, the items that showed the highest scores were 11 and 19, which refer to the union between the members. Although the pattern of authority is not clearly evident, the participants perceive a clear link between family members (Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis of FACES III Scale Items.

Item	Rarely		Rarely		Sometimes times		Many		Most of the time	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1. My family members support each other.	8	3.9	12	5.9	51	24.9	88	42.9	46	22.9
2. In my family, the suggestions of my children are taken into account to solve problems.	10	4.9	32	15.6	62	30.2	65	31.7	36	17.6
3. We accept friends of other family members.	7	3.4	11	5.4	61	29.8	69	33.7	57	27.8
4. The children also have a say in their discipline.	24	11.7	32	15.6	60	29.3	56	27.3	33	16.1
5. We like to do things only with our family.	14	6.8	35	17.1	49	23.9	54	26.3	53	25.9
6. Different family members can act as authorities, depending on the circumstances.	115	56.1	48	23.4	24	11.7	11	5.4	7	3.4
7. My family members feel closer to each other than they do to people outside.	22	10.7	34	16.6	47	22.9	56	27.3	46	22.4
8.- My family changes the way we do things.	23	11.2	40	19.5	64	31.2	56	27.3	22	10.7
9. My family members enjoy spending their free time together.	10	4.9	19	9.3	44	21.5	67	32.7	65	31.7
10. In my house, parents and children discuss punishments together.	47	22.9	49	23.9	44	21.5	47	22.9	18	8.8
11. My family members feel very close to each other.	5	2.4	10	4.9	37	18.0	79	38.5	74	36.1
12. In my family, children also make decisions.	17	8.3	40	19.5	71	34.6	47	22.9	30	14.6
13. When my family gets together to do something together, everyone is present.	7	3.4	18	8.8	57	27.8	75	36.6	48	23.4
14. In my family, the rules often change.	25	12.2	52	25.4	85	41.5	29	14.1	14	6.8
15. We can easily think of activities to do together as a family.	15	7.3	40	19.5	60	29.3	59	28.8	31	15.1
16. We exchange household chores with each other.	6	2.9	13	6.3	36	17.6	88	42.9	62	30.2
17. The members of my family consult with each other to make decisions.	13	6.3	19	9.3	65	31.7	64	31.2	44	21.5
18. It is challenging to determine who holds authority in our family.	104	50.7	40	19.5	19	9.3	22	10.7	20	9.8
19. Family unity is very important to us.	5	2.4	8	3.9	25	12.2	66	32.2	101	49.3
20. In my family, it's difficult to determine who is responsible for which household chores.	75	36.6	42	20.5	46	22.4	32	15.6	10	4.9

Source: Analysis obtained from data processing in SPSS Version 25.



Family functioning can be assessed in a unidimensional, bidimensional, or multidimensional way through the FACES III test. Its unidimensional score represents the totality of the score, denominated as cohesion and adaptability, which, for the evaluated cases, ranged from a

minimum score of 33 to a maximum of 92, with a mean of 65.20. This indicates that the majority of the scores fell within the medium to high range. However, the value of  $SD = 11.316$  showed that the variability of the scores had a tendency towards diversity in the responses (Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics on family cohesion and adaptability.

	Minimum	Maximum	Media	Deviation
Cohesion and Adaptability	33	92	65.20	11.316

Source: analysis obtained from data processing in SPSS Version 25.

For the specific analysis of the multiple dimensions of the Family Functioning Scale, the total score of the FACES III subscales was examined using descriptive statistics, including minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation. The two main subscales of the functioning scale are family bonding and family flexibility, which showed lower scores on family

bonding and a lower mean on family flexibility. Overall, it can be stated that the family functioning subscale corresponding to family flexibility is the lowest among the participants in this study (Table 3). Finally, the other subscales show that the lowest means were found in the establishment of discipline and limits in the participants' families.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of family functioning subscales

	Minimum	Maximum	Media	Deviation
Family links	11	50	36.78	6.970
Family flexibility	16	45	28.42	5.772
Unit	4	20	15.49	3.176
Limits	2	10	6.81	1.885
Friendships and time	2	10	7.54	1.628
Leisure	2	10	6.93	1.809
Leadership	5	20	10.43	2.631
Discipline	2	10	5.91	2.212
Rules and roles	5	20	12.08	2.571

Source: analysis obtained from data processing in SPSS Version 25.

To conduct a detailed analysis of the interpretation of the raw scores obtained, an extrapolation of these scores was performed using the descriptive statistics from the reference group

as a point of reference. Thus, it was identified that the scores for family bonding, referring to the affective bond established between family members, were predominantly located in medium-

high scores, although a significant percentage of participants also fell in the medium-low scores, indicating a perception of disengagement between family members.

Regarding family flexibility, which refers to the capacity of the family system to adapt to changes and stressful situations typical of the different life cycles of the family unit, the participants were mostly grouped in scores considered medium. The distribution of these data shows that most of them presented medium-high and medium-low scores. In the distribution of the data, it is evident that almost half of the participants exhibit scores with a tendency towards low values, while the other half shows a tendency towards high scores.

As for the score levels obtained in the subscales of cohesion and adaptability, they showed a tendency towards medium-high and high scores, although it should be noted that these levels were received in relation to the scores of the reference group and unlike the raw scores, these acquire a different meaning given that the averages leaned towards medium-low scores.

## DISCUSSION

When assessing family cohesion and adaptability in adolescents, it was found that the items with the lowest scores corresponded to 6 and 18, the former referring to the positive perception of the role that some family members can assume and the latter falling into the same category.

This suggests that the participants have a disordered and chaotic view of authority within the family; that is, it is a family nucleus in which it is not possible to identify who represents authority, nor do some of the members actively assume this role. Calvete and Veytia (17) also observed that some parents may feel uncomfortable recognizing that their sons and daughters treat them aggressively, disrespecting their authority, related to the fact that society interprets this as a failure on the part of the parents to establish limits and educate (18-20).

On the other hand, the items that showed the highest scores were 11 and 19, which refer to the unity that exists between members, i.e., although

a pattern of authority is not clearly perceived, participants interpret a powerful bond between family members in that sense, some research reports that family support, including siblings, is perceived as a protective factor; also peers are important in the affective bonding of adolescence, providing security to face challenges, demands and threats, deeply linked to mental health and psychopathology (6,10) cooperation among family members is also perceived as a protective factor that prevents intrafamily violence (21).

The unidimensional score represents the totality of the score, denominated as cohesion and adaptability, which for the evaluated cases ranged from a minimum score of 33 and a maximum of 92, with a mean of 65.20. This indicates that the majority of the scores are located in the medium-high range. Nevertheless, the standard deviation (SD) of 11.316 indicated that the variability of the scores tended to be more diverse across the answers.

These results invite to reaffirm Circumplex Model (22) as it combines the dimensions of cohesion and adaptability, where it describes a variety of couple and family relationship systems; in that sense, cohesion is understood as the emotional bonding between family members and the level of independence of each person within the system, on the other hand, adaptability refers to the system's ability to restructure the power of the relationship between roles and the rules of interaction according to contexts. The model is dynamic, meaning it undergoes continuous change over time, as evidenced in numerous research studies (23).

The two subscales of the family system are family bonding and family flexibility, which showed lower scores in family bonding and a lower mean in family flexibility. Together, this indicates that the family functioning subscale corresponding to family flexibility is the lowest among the participants in the study. Finally, the other subscales indicate that the lowest means were observed in the establishment of discipline and limits within the families of the participants. Family cohesion refers to the emotional bond that family members share with each other, evaluating the level of connection or disconnection among family members, with extremes indicating dysfunctionality (6,22).

Based on Olson's Circumplex model, some concepts that measure the cohesion variable are taken up; among them are emotional bonding, which has other sub-variables, including limits, which define the family in relation to society, and whether they are flexible or rigid gives openness to socialization without losing family unity and control (12,23), this being an indicator that the perception of adolescents at the Brasília Bosa Educational Institute is that there are poor limits together with a lack of discipline.

In relation to the score levels obtained in the subscales of cohesion and adaptability, they showed a tendency towards medium-high and high scores. However, it is worth noting that these levels were determined in relation to the scores of the reference group. Unlike the raw scores, they acquire a different meaning, given that the averages were skewed towards medium-low scores. Related to the above, a study conducted in Ecuador with adolescents aged 15 to 19 years revealed low family cohesion, particularly among those from detached families. On the other hand, levels of adaptability related to chaotic families were also found; more than half of the sample fell into this dimension (6).

### CONCLUSIONS

In the sample studied, there is a chaotic vision of authority in the family, indicating that it is a family nucleus in which it is not possible to identify who or who represents authority, nor do some of the members actively assume it, this type of family implies a restricted or unfruitful leadership, where there is no control or discipline, absence of clear roles and rules that change frequently. Similarly, some subscales indicate a weak establishment of discipline and limits in the families of the participants. This situation is also observed in the dynamics of families in the Bosa sector, where the majority are single-parent or reconstituted families.

With regard to family ties, there is unity among the members of the families of the adolescents studied, indicating that a pattern of authority is not clearly perceived; the participants interpret a very strong bond between the members of the family, which is built through the bonds of affection

and solidarity with the different members of the family, this being a very important resource that strengthens the cohesion of the family group in times of crisis.

Based on the results and studies conducted by other authors, it is suggested that academic areas with potential correlations to the family system or family support should be explored in greater depth. It is also important that the school guidance area of the Brasília Bosa Educational Institution develop educational, informational, and communication strategies that encourage the linkage, flexibility, cohesion, and adaptability of families, which contribute to the integral formation and growth of each of its members.

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