Do Adolescents’ Social Connectedness and Health-Promoting behaviors relate to Family Communication and Satisfaction?

Marlene Tovar, MA, BSN, RN
Lynn Rew, EdD, RN, AHN-BC, FAAN
The University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing

Purpose: To determine whether adolescents’ health-promoting behaviors (HPB) and social connectedness are related to family communication and family satisfaction.

Methods: The data source for this analysis is from the pre-intervention phase of a feasibility study that provided a brief motivational intervention to increase health-promoting behaviors (nutritional diet, adequate sleep, and physical activity) among middle and high school students. Family data (family communication, family satisfaction, access to a computer at home) were obtained from a parent or legal guardian. The sample consisted of 28 adolescents (mean age 13 ± 1.34, 43% were high school students, 21% males, 50% Hispanic, 25% African American). We measured three health-promoting behaviors of adolescents: (a) nutritional practices (b) adequate sleep patterns, and (c) physical activity (PA); and three social influences on adolescents’ social connectedness: (a) family communication, (b) family satisfaction, and (c) access to a computer at home. The analyses included measures of the prevalence of health-promoting behaviors, correlations and bivariate analyses to evaluate relationships between HPB and social influences.

Findings: About 90% of respondents reported being physically active at least 30 minutes 4-5 times a week, 68% ate a healthy breakfast every morning, and 75% declared usually sleeping 8 or more hours each night. Parents surveyed included 96% female, 29% single, 43% had not completed a high school education or GED, mean age 43 ± 6.9. The mean scores for the 10-item family communication and family satisfaction scales (Cronbach’s alpha .90 and .93, respectively) were 40.4 and 37.6, respectively [score ranges 10-50]. The mean score for the 10-item Adolescent Connectedness Scale (Cronbach’s alpha .89) was 42.1 ±7.3 [scores ranged from 10-50]. The family communication and satisfaction scores show no significant association with adolescents’ connectedness scores. Only family satisfaction was positively associated with adolescents having a healthy breakfast every morning ($p < .05$). Having adequate sleep was strongly related to having a healthy breakfast every morning ($p < .01$). Family communication and family satisfaction were significantly associated with each other ($p < .01$). Adolescents’ PA was significantly related to having access to a home computer ($p < .01$).

Conclusions: This study found no associations between adolescents’ connectedness and family communication or family satisfaction. However, the findings suggest that some HPB in younger and older adolescents are positively related to family satisfaction. The finding that adolescents’ physical activity was positively associated with having access to a home computer was surprising. This positive association may be due to factors such as improving access to information and communication. These findings warrant further study with larger samples.

Acknowledgement: The authors acknowledge Whitney Thurman who assisted with providing the intervention and collecting data as well as the staff at Del Valley Children’s Wellness Center for assisting with recruitment and providing space for the study.