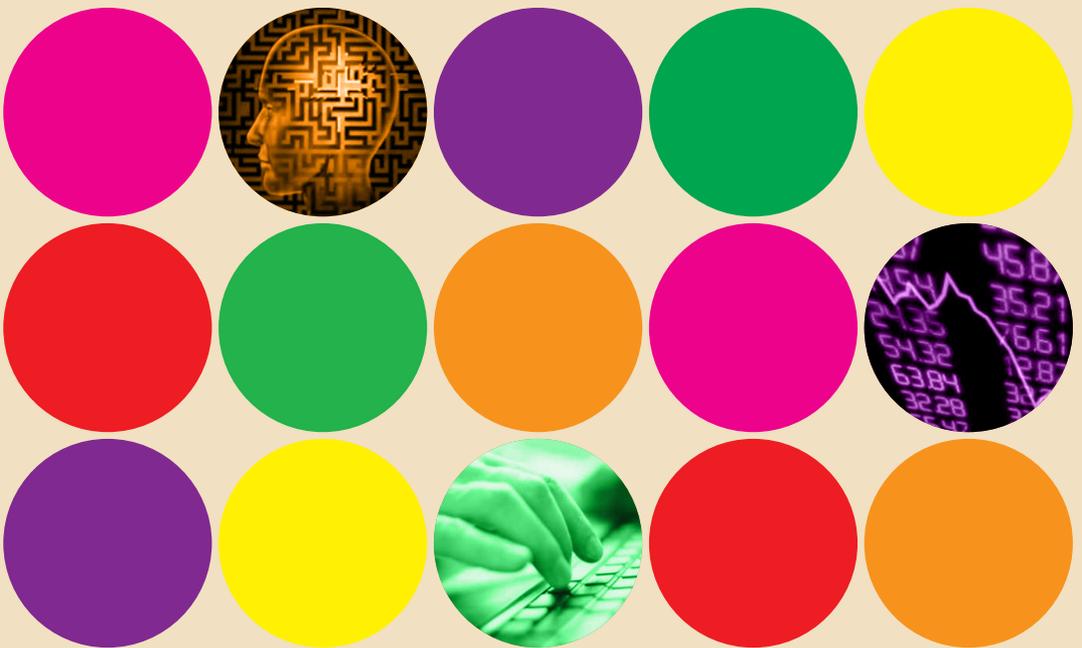




The Psychology of the Recession on the Workplace



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NEW HORIZONS IN MANAGEMENT
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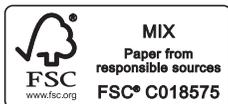
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2. Socioeconomic adversity and family stressors in relation to school achievement among Greek, Serbian and Albanian students

Alexander-Stamatios Antoniou, Marina Dalla, Ledi Kashahu, Dhori Karaj, George Michailidis and Evi Georgiadi

Poverty is one of the biggest social problems of the 21st Century. In the United States, 12.1 per cent of all people live in conditions of poverty or near poverty (Rank, 2005) and the majority of the nation will experience poverty at least once. In the EU in 2006, there were 72 million people at risk of falling into poverty, one in five people living in substandard housing and 10 per cent living in households wherein all members were unemployed (Commission of the European Communities, 2007). The countries with the highest levels of human poverty in the EU are Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece and Malta (Bubbico and Dijkstra, 2011). In the United Kingdom, the proportion of individuals living in poverty increased from 15 per cent in 1981 to 22 per cent in 2002 to 2003, representing 12.4 million people (Paxton and Dixon, 2004). According to the Child Poverty Act (HM Government, 2011), 22 per cent of children were living in relative poverty in 2008/2009 and 17 per cent of children were living in both low income households with material deprivation in 2008–09). In the majority of the EU countries children are at greater risk of poverty than the total population (20 per cent versus 17 per cent) (Eurostat, 2010). Child poverty in Greece is larger than in the EU (Matsaganis, 2010). In Serbia, children aged 6–14 years old are the highest poverty group of the population (Bradshaw and Chzhen, 2009). According to the Albanian Institute of Statistics, 32 per cent of children between 6 and 17 years old in the country have to work due to poverty, their parents' unemployment or migration, and a disrupted family environment etc. (ILO, 2009). Poverty rates are higher among households with children and for single-parent families (OECD, 2008).

Research has shown that social conditions of poverty as reflected by low socioeconomic status (SES) (Conger and Donnellan, 2007) and home environment, including parent-child interaction (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998) influence the academic achievement of various age groups, and especially of middle adolescents (Lacour and Tissington, 2011). According to a report by the OECD (2011), socio-economic background is one of the strongest correlates of academic performance of 15-year-old students. Different studies indicate that increases in parental education, at least for the mother, may lead to improvement in the child's intellectual performance (Huston and Bentley, 2010). This improvement in students' achievement is believed to be related to a measure of the beliefs and expectations regarding the children's performance and the specific achievement behaviors in the home (for example, reading, parental teaching) (Davis-Kean, 2005). These factors are related to parents with professional degree education, in comparison to those with little education, in that such parents feel more able to assist their children with homework and are more able to be involved in the schooling of their children (Walker et al., 2005). In general, parent's education level and occupation are indicators of the parents' intellectual resources and social status, or human (knowledge and skills) and social (connections and social networks) capital (Bradley and Corwyn, 2002; Conger and Donnellan, 2007).

Although parental education and occupation explain a large part of the variance in educational school achievement of students, a significant portion of the variation also comes from additional family factors, such as family size (Marteletto, 2010) and residential density. Past research has shown a negative association between family size and school achievement in the developed countries due to the dilution of family resources and their translation into less capital for each child (Steelman et al., 2002). However, this association is found to be less consistent in developing nations, partly because of different cultural values that support the extended family (Marteletto, 2010). Other studies have demonstrated that the coexistence of family risk factors such as parents' unemployment and large family size contribute to the increased risk of negative outcomes for adolescents from low-income households (Gutman et al., 2005).

Along with various family stressors, living in crowded homes (more than one person per room) is an important aspect of a physical micro-environment that can produce elevated physiological stress and adverse developmental outcomes for children (Evans et al., 2010). Overcrowded homes may increase noise and home chaos that reduce parental responsiveness and interfere with children's studies and cognitive development. Alternatively, the problem could be a simple lack of space to sit down and do homework. Research has also associated household chaos with

reductions in children's IQ scores and increases in adjustment behavior problems in western and non-western cultures (Brown and Low, 2008; Deater-Deckard et al., 2009).

Adolescent achievement seems to benefit mainly from family interaction (Crosnoe and Elder, 2004), family cohesion and family adaptability. Family cohesion defined as emotional ties, family interactions and communication between family members (Olson, 2000) is associated with good adaptation of children and adolescents in the face of adversity (Masten and Obradović, 2006). Family cohesion provides young people with perceptions of family level support and closeness, similar to attachment (King et al., 2005) or a secure and affective parent-adolescent relationship that constitutes an important predictor of a young person's academic achievement (Amato and Fowler, 2002; Crosnoe and Elder, 2004). Conversely, emotional distance in the parent-adolescent relationship can lead to low levels of school adjustment and achievement (Crosnoe and Elder, 2004). Healthy family functioning is exhibited not only in terms of physical and emotional proximity, but also in terms of flexibility as a members' competence to adjust their relationships through patterns of communication, and to understand decision-making processes, relationship rules and role expectations (Olson, 2000). From this point of view, healthy families are able to maintain a balance between security, intimacy and sharing on the one hand, and individuality on the other (Hill et al., 2003).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998) provides a useful conceptual framework for understanding the relationships between school achievement of adolescents in different cultural settings, proximal contexts and proximal processes. According to the bioecological model, developmental outcomes are affected by the contexts with which children and adolescents have direct and indirect contact. Using the ecological model we focus on the roles that SES, demographic characteristics of the family, interaction between adolescents and their parents and macrosystem (different cultural groups with different social and economic patterns, and cultural values) play in terms of adolescent school competence.

According to previous literature, low parent education and low occupational status are often associated with low economic resources and poverty (Huston and Bentley, 2010), leading to economic pressure in the family and difficulties with child and adolescent development (Conger and Donnellan, 2007). Another variable included in the bioecological model

is the term 'chaotic system' (Bronfenbrenner and Evans, 2000), which is characterized by lack of structure in daily life, overcrowded home, etc. A chaotic home environment has the potential to interfere with the proximal processes, such as interaction between family members that foster competence and can lead directly to proximal processes that predict dysfunctional development. Although environment is an important element of the bioecological model, proximal processes have a specific meaning, because they refer to the 'complex interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects and symbols in its immediate external environment' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Family interactions and communication between family members are examples of proximal processes that mediate some of the effects of SES on children and adolescents (Conger and Donnellan, 2007). Longitudinal studies refer to adaptive systems in adolescence that include not only a learning system comprised of academic achievement, information processing and problem solving skills, but also a family system which promotes caring relationships with parents, models interpersonal dynamics and establishes norms for behavior (Masten and Obradović, 2006). When adaptive family systems operate effectively, positive academic achievement is a likely result even under adverse socioeconomic and demographic conditions.

Cross-cultural and cross-ethnic studies show that especially with respect to issues concerning the proximal processes and family relationships, large cross-cultural differences still prevail (Fuligni et al., 1999). For example, high independence in family relations, loyalty and bonding within the family are expected from family members in collectivist cultures, more than in individualistic cultures (Hofstede, 2001). Parental leadership and control is perceived as a constraint by adolescents from individualistic contexts, but experienced as support by adolescents from collectivistic contexts (Trommsdorff, 1995). However, the most important finding from research is that there are more similarities than differences across families from various ethnic groups and cultures across the world. For instance, Fuligni (1998) examined family cohesion among students of European, Chinese, Mexican and Filipino decent. The study reported that overall mean levels and correlates of family cohesion were similar across all ethnic groups.

THE PRESENT STUDY

The aim of this study was to examine the extent to which the school achievement of Greek, Serbian and Albanian adolescents is related to

socioeconomic and demographic family status on the one hand, and to family cohesion and adaptability on the other. Longitudinal studies indicate that academic achievement is a main developmental task for adolescents (Masten and Obradović, 2006) and attention needs to be given to family cohesion and adaptability as they are experienced by adolescents. These two processes indicate how adolescents experience individuality by establishing autonomy, and how they accept the embeddedness of family relations by seeking validation from parents. The compatibility or coexistence of these two processes establishes the matrix for the adolescent's enculturation and for parent's efforts to ensure cultural transition (Kwak, 2003). Enculturation as an unintentional developmental process of learning culture and being social within a particular society is strong during adolescence, because it broadens the adolescent's lifestyle beyond their family process (Kagitçibasi, 2007).

Previous comparative research has found cross-cultural differences with regard to the way in which Serbian, Greek and Albanian adolescents view family functioning (Antoniou et al., 2011). There were no differences regarding family adaptability, but family cohesion was higher among the Serbian adolescents. This latter finding was interpreted in light of the cultural Serbian context that includes 20 years of transition processes (Tomanović, 2006) following multidimensional destruction of the previous society. Under the influence of stressful events and processes Serbian families have dramatically increased family cohesion and emotional bonding (Polovina, 2007).

Greece is a member of the European Union. According to previous research, over the past years extensive individualization of Greek society has taken place and a shift to modern family roles has occurred (Georgas, 1989). Individualization can be related more to the adaptability of family and changes in roles and leadership organization among family members. However, the results illustrate the continuing importance of the in-group in Greek society. The individualist self of Greek society goes with a positive evaluation and importance of the collective self (Pouliasi and Verkuyten, 2011). This means that traditional values of family roles remain important for Greek families.

Albania is a country of internal and external migration (Carletto et al., 2006). With a resident population of just over three million at the 2001 census, approximately one in four Albanians now live abroad, especially in Greece, Italy and the United Kingdom (King and Vullnetari, 2009), and more than eight per cent of the population has moved within the country (INSTAT, 2004). It is estimated that migration has an important impact on the transformations of patriarchal power structures reshaping gender and generational relations (King and Vullnetari,

2009). Transnational economic and care strategies that connect family members within their place of origin, and those at the new destination/s provide new opportunities for families to improve their lives, to escape patriarchal family relations and to reconfigure power inequalities (King and Vullnetari, 2009).

Based on the previously discussed literature we analyzed the influence of a group of family variables, both socioeconomic and demographic status and family functioning, on the academic achievement of Greek, Serbian and Albanian adolescents. Our objectives were as follows:

- to examine the similarities and differences of family functioning in three groups of students;
- to investigate the distribution of socioeconomic and demographic adversities in three groups of students;
- to examine the relationship of both socioeconomic and demographic adversities to family functioning in three cultural groups;
- to investigate the contribution of both socioeconomic and demographic adversities and family functioning on the academic achievement of three cultural groups.

METHOD

Participants

In total, 554 students aged from 14 to 17 years ($M = 15.52$, $SD = 0.68$), took part in this study. The Greek adolescents were 75 boys and 81 girls attending different public schools in the greater Athens area. The Serbian adolescents (82 boys and 86 girls) were students attending different public schools in Nis, and finally, 123 boys and 107 girls were Albanian students attending different public schools in Tirana. There were no significant differences regarding participant's age and gender. There were significant differences regarding educational level (compulsory, secondary and higher) of father $\chi^2(4, n = 554) = 43.53, p < 0.001$ and mother $\chi^2(4, n = 554) = 64.90, p < 0.001$. Greek and Serbian parents were more likely to hold higher education degrees than Albanian parents. Albanian mothers were also more likely than Greek and Serbian mothers to hold a low occupational status $\chi^2(2, n = 521) = 195.34, p < 0.001$. The majority of students belonged to the intact family (91 per cent) and only 9 per cent belonged to the one-parent family group (16 per cent of Greek students, 11.9 per cent of Serbian students, 2.2 per cent of Albanian students) $\chi^2(2, n = 550) = 24.16, p < 0.001$. Most of the students (57.4 per cent) lived in family

Table 2.1 Demographic characteristics of the sample ($N=554$)

	Country					
	Greece		Serbia		Albania	
Gender	Female 51.9	Male 48.1	Female 51.2	Male 48.8	Female 46.5	Male 53.5
Parents education:	<i>Mother</i>	<i>Father</i>	<i>Mother</i>	<i>Father</i>	<i>Mother</i>	<i>Father</i>
– compulsory	16.0	18.6	15.5	14.9	18.7	14.8
– secondary	31.4	28.8	47.6	42.3	66.1	60.9
– higher	52.6	52.6	36.9	42.9	15.2	24.3
Professional status:	<i>Mother</i>	<i>Father</i>	<i>Mother</i>	<i>Father</i>	<i>Mother</i>	<i>Father</i>
– high	63.6	83.6	62	82.6	3.5	79.9
– low	36.4	26.4	38	17.4	96.5	20.1
Family structure	<i>Intact</i>	<i>Non-intact</i>	<i>Intact</i>	<i>Non-intact</i>	<i>Intact</i>	<i>Non-intact</i>
	84	16	88.1	11.9	97.8	2.2
Family size	<i>1–2 children</i>	<i>3 children and more</i>	<i>1–2 children</i>	<i>3 children and more</i>	<i>1–2 children</i>	<i>3 children and more</i>
	75.3	24.7	55.1	44.9	47	53
Residential density	<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>
	14.9	85.1	30.4	69.6	75.2	24.8

homes consisting of one or two children (Greeks: 75.3 per cent; Serbians: 55.1 per cent; Albanians: 47 per cent) with the remainder (42.6 per cent) living in family homes with 3 or more children (Greeks: 24.7 per cent; Serbians: 44.9 per cent; Albanians: 53 per cent) $\chi^2(2, n = 551) = 30.85$, $p < 0.001$. More Albanian students reported high residential density (for instance, the quotient of the number of people living in the house to the number of the rooms in the house being higher than one) (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2008) (Table 2.1).

Procedure

Data collection took place in different schools in Athens, Nis and Tirana after obtaining consent for student cooperation. Students participated in the study on a voluntary basis. The questionnaires were administrated in the class in the presence of the regular teacher. Each student was given a randomly ordered questionnaire packet that required them to answer a number of questions. It was emphasized that the data were anonymous, that participation was voluntary and that there was no obligation to

participate or to continue participating. Data was collected in spring 2009 and the semester-end point averages were obtained from self-references of students.

Measures

School achievement was measured by the semester-end point averages as reported by students. School grades are considered as valid measures of learning because they reflect students' efforts and motivation (Deslandes et al., 1997). Because the grading scale is different across groups, we used within country standardization.

Family functioning was measured by the family adaptability and cohesion evaluation scale II (FACES II) (Olson et al., 1983). The FACES II consists of 30 items that correspond to two factors: cohesion (16 items) and adaptability (14 items). The 16 cohesion items include eight concepts, such as emotional bonding, family boundaries, coalitions, time, space, friends, decision-making, and interests and recreation (for example: 'Family members are supportive to each other during difficult times', 'Family members feel very close to each other'). The 14 flexibility items include six concepts, related to the flexibility dimensions of assertiveness, leadership, discipline, negotiations, roles and rules (for example: 'In our family, it is easy for everyone to express his/her opinion', 'Family members discuss problems and feel good about the solutions') (Olson et al., 1983). The FACES II scale invites students to comment on the relationships and attitudes of their family on a five-point Likert scale, with one indicating 'almost never' and five 'almost always'. In the present sample, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the Greek students were $\alpha = 0.75$ for cohesion and $\alpha = 0.70$ for adaptability. For Serbian students, coefficients for cohesion and adaptability subscales were 0.84 and 0.79 respectively. Using a sample of Albanian students, cohesion was $\alpha = 0.74$ and adaptability $\alpha = 0.67$.

Students were asked to provide information regarding their gender and age, parent's marital status, family structure, family size, the number of people living in the house, the number of rooms in the house and parent's education and occupation.

Socioeconomic adversity

Socioeconomic status was based on two indicators: parents educational and occupational status (Conger and Donnellan, 2007). The risk factors included low education (compulsory) and low professional status (for example, unskilled worker, unemployed) of either parent. The possible range of risk factors was from 0 to 4.

Family demographic adversity

Family demographic status was based on family size and on a residential density. Family adversity included a large family (three children or more) and a high residential density.

The questionnaires were initially drafted in Greek and were translated to the Serbian and Albanian languages by bilingual translators. The translation process involved three steps: (a) initial translation of questionnaires by the bilingual translators; (b) editing of the translation by the second translators; and (c) review for quality of consistency in both languages.

RESULTS

Family Cohesion by Gender and Country

There were significant differences regarding family cohesion and cultural group $F(3, 539) = 5.21$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = 0.019$. According to the Tukey test, Serbian students reported higher family cohesion than Greeks. Albanian students reported a higher family cohesion score than Greeks and lower family score than Serbians (Table 2.2). Girls ($M = 3.74$) reported more family adaptability than boys ($M = 3.83$), $F = (1546) = 4.13$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.008$. There was no significant interaction of gender and country with family cohesion.

Sociodemographic and Family Adversities by Gender and Country

The results indicated that Albanian and Greek students reported higher socioeconomic adversity than Serbian students $\chi^2(2, n = 554) = 22.26$, $p < 0.001$. More Albanian and Serbian students reported higher family

Table 2.2 Mean scores of cultural groups for family adaptability and cohesion

Family functioning	Cultural group						
	Greeks		Albanians		Serbians		F-value
	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	
Cohesion	3.80b	0.51	3.88ab	0.44	3.95a	0.64	5.21**
Adaptability	3.76	0.47	3.75	0.41	3.85	0.61	2.97

Note: ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 2.3 Distribution of adversity according to cultural group

Socioeconomic adversity	Cultural group						χ^2 -value
	Greeks		Serbians		Albanians		
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	
High (2-4)	43	27.6	28	16.7	88	38.3	22.26***
Low (0-1)	113	72.4	140	83.3	142	61.7	
Demographic family adversity							
High (1-2)	45	29.2	84	52.2	181	78.7	94.12***
Low (0-0)	109	70.8	77	47.8	49	21.2	

Note: *** $p < 0.001$.

demographic adversity ($\chi^2 (2, n = 545) = 94.12, p < 0.001$ than Greek students. There were no differences regarding the gender of participants (Table 2.3).

Family Cohesion by Sociodemographic and Family Adversity

The results indicated that high socioeconomic adversity was related to lower family cohesion $F(1, 546) = 24.78, p < 0.001$ and lower family adaptability $F(1, 546) = 23.78, p < 0.001$. Similarly, the high family demographic adversity was related to lower family cohesion $F(1, 539) = 5.58, p < 0.05$ and lower family adaptability $F(1, 539) = 8.50, p < 0.01$. There were no significant relationships between country and adversities with family cohesion and adaptability (Table 2.4).

Socioeconomic Adversity, Family Demographic Adversity and Gender Predicting Family Functioning for Each Cultural Group

Separate regressions were performed to examine the relations between SES, family adversity and family functioning for each cultural group. In these analyses entry order was as follows: step 1 was gender, step 2 was SES and step 3 was family adversity. According to results, low socioeconomic ($\beta = -0.17, t = -2.16, p < 0.05, R^2 = 0.029$) and family demographic ($\beta = -0.20, t = -2.52, p < 0.01, R^2 = 0.06$) adversities for the Greek sample were related to higher family cohesion. Low family adversity for the Greek samples was also related to higher family adaptability ($\beta = -0.16, t = -1.95, p = 0.05, R^2 = 0.025$). Low

Table 2.4 Family cohesion by levels of adversities

Family functioning	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i> -value
	Socioeconomic adversity				
	High (2–4)		Low (0–1)		
Cohesion	3.71	0.50	3.95	0.52	24.98***
Adaptability	3.60	0.49	3.85	0.48	23.78***
Family functioning	Family demographic adversity				<i>F</i> -value
	High (2–4)		Low (0–1)		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Cohesion	3.81	0.53	3.93	0.52	5.58*
Adaptability	3.71	0.50	3.85	0.49	8.50**

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 2.5 Hierarchical regressions for the prediction of family functioning from gender and adversities for three cultural groups

Prediction variables	Greeks		Serbians		Albanians	
	Cohesion β	Adaptability β	Cohesion β	Adaptability β	Cohesion β	Adaptability β
1. Gender	0.01	0.04	0.06	0.09	0.10	0.09
2. Socio-economic adversity	-0.17**	-0.14	-0.22**	-0.18*	-0.20**	-0.31***
3. Family dem. adversity	-0.20**	-0.16*	-0.06	-0.14	-0.06	-0.08
Total R^2	0.06	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.10

socioeconomic adversity for the Serbian sample was associated with higher family cohesion ($\beta = -0.22$, $t = -2.83$, $p < 0.01$, $R^2 = 0.037$) and higher family adaptability ($\beta = -0.18$, $t = -2.36$, $p < 0.05$, $R^2 = 0.033$). For the Albanian sample, low socioeconomic adversity was related to high family cohesion ($\beta = -0.20$, $t = -3.06$, $p < 0.01$, $R^2 = 0.039$) and high family adaptability ($\beta = -0.31$, $t = -4.98$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.097$).

Table 2.6 Hierarchical regressions for the prediction of school achievement from gender, SES, family adversity and family functioning for three cultural groups

Prediction variables	Greeks β	Serbians β	Albanians β
1. Gender (1=boy, 2=girl)	0.30***	0.27**	0.40***
2. SES (1=low, 2=high)	-0.17*	-0.08	-0.08
3. Family adversity	-0.03	-0.15*	0.006
4. Family functioning:			
– family cohesion	0.18	0.26*	0.13*
– family adaptability	-0.01	-0.05	0.21**
Total R^2	0.16	0.16	0.31

Socioeconomic Status, Demographic Family Adversity and Family Functioning Predicting School Achievement

Separate regressions were performed to examine relations between school achievement, SES, demographic family adversity and family functioning for each cultural group. In these analyses the entry order was as follows: step 1 was gender, step 2 was SES, step 3 was family demographic adversity and step 4 was family functioning.

Results of hierarchical multiple regression based on the Greek sample indicated that gender ($\beta = 0.30$, $t = 3.79$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.087$) and SES ($\beta = -0.17$, $t = -2.07$, $p < 0.05$, $R^2 = 0.041$) were significant predictors of school achievement. Girls had better school achievement than boys and low socioeconomic adversity is related to high school achievement. Hierarchical regression analysis for the Serbian sample indicated that girls had better school achievement than boys ($\beta = 0.27$, $t = 3.62$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.074$). Low family demographic adversity ($\beta = -0.15$, $t = -2.01$, $p < 0.05$, $R^2 = 0.028$) and high family cohesion ($\beta = 0.26$, $t = 2.07$, $p < 0.05$, $R^2 = 0.046$) were related to high school achievement. For the Albanian sample, girls had better school achievement than boys ($\beta = 0.40$, $t = 7.21$, $p = 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.20$). SES and family adversity were not a significant predictor of school achievement. High family cohesion ($\beta = 0.13$, $t = 1.91$, $p = 0.05$) and high family adaptability ($\beta = 0.21$, $t = 2.92$, $p < 0.01$, total $R^2 = 0.08$) were significant positive predictors of school achievement.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide evidence for similarities and differences regarding family functioning and both socioeconomic and demographic adversities of Greek, Serbian and Albanian students. Among the Serbian adolescents, the perception of family cohesion is higher than among Greek and Albanian students, in agreement with previous research (Antoniou et al., 2011). There were no cultural differences in the family adaptability of the three cultural groups. Serbian society was undergoing a long lasting and traumatic transition (Polovina, 2007). It is likely that during such a transition process, family members adopt aspects of more connectedness as an important aspect of getting by and surviving in a crisis. There are studies that point to special kinds of significant change in the Serbian family structure and functioning. The severe housing shortage led to the increase of extended family households with young couples staying with parents, and strong bonding within the family has the function of compensating for institutional deficits regarding childcare and employment (Tomanović, 2008).

The results of socioeconomic and demographic adversities illustrate some similarities between the groups. Greek and Albanian students report more socioeconomic adversity than Serbian students, and Albanian and Serbian students refer to more family demographic adversity than Greeks. In the context of the Serbian and Albanian sample demographic family adversity is not related to family cohesion and adaptability, while for Greek students a large family (three children and more) and a high residential density are related to lower bonding and communication among family members. For all groups high socioeconomic adversity has a negative impact on family functioning. According to our results, in the Greek context, relatedness and bonding are stronger in the context of the nuclear family, while in the Albanian and Serbian context emotional interdependence remains the same in the nuclear and the extended family. This is in agreement with other studies that indicate the tendency of Greek society toward the nuclear family system with a strong attachment to the family members and close contacts with relatives (Mylonas et al., 2006). In the context of Albanian and Serbian groups we observe a kind of harmonic symbiosis between different generations, which are not seen as threatening for family cohesion and adaptability. This finding may be related to a family model of (total) interdependence prevalent in traditional cultures characterized by emotionally and materially interdependent and hierarchical relationships between family members (Kagitcibasi, 1996; 2007), and the prevalence of the extended family.

It is important to note that all groups consider socioeconomic adversity

as a threat to family cohesion and adaptability, but only Greek students have related socioeconomic adversity to school achievement. It seems that for Greek students, social status of the family in terms of social position, prestige and economic well-being have important implications for both family relationships and school achievement. However, close emotional links with the parents and a hierarchical role among family members demonstrated no influence on school achievement. Few studies conducted in North America, Australia, the UK, Holland and other North European countries have indicated a low influence of parents on late adolescence, an individualistic orientation that places a high value on autonomy of the adolescent and the sources of support that become more relevant during this period, such as friends (Helsen et al., 2000; Scholte et al., 2001). The straightforward connection of SES with school achievement of Greek adolescents can be seen as a marker of social capital (Conger and Donnellan, 2007) in so far as people with high status have more economic resources and advanced skills and connections that facilitate family functioning and the education of children.

In contrast, for Serbian and Albanian students, the social status of the family has an impact on family functioning which in turn influences the academic achievement of adolescents. Although the connection of SES has no direct effect on school achievement of Serbian and Albanian students, it can be considered as a mark of human capital, knowledge and skills (Conger and Donnellan, 2007) that influence children and adolescent development. For example, lower-SES parents compared with middle-SES parents are more likely to use more authoritarian practices leading to less competent social and emotional development for children and adolescents (Steinberg, 2001).

According to our results, for the Serbian students, high achievement is related to low family adversity. Serbian students consider residential crowding as a risk factor for academic achievement, while for Greek students it is a negative factor for family functioning. For Albanian adolescents residential density has no relation to family functioning and school achievement. One of the more fascinating features of traditional Albanian society is its large 'extended family' structure, called 'fisi' that express the principle of kinship, the fact of being kin or parents (etymology from Modern Greek, *physis*, 'nature, character' (Meyer, 1891: 105). About 80 per cent of students in our study refer to living in families with more than four members.

Gender difference was significant with a higher school competence in girls, despite the origin country. This finding coincides with the results of the research indicating that gender differences emerge in early adolescence and increase dramatically from middle to late adolescence, with girls

showing higher school performance (Alton-Lee and Praat, 2001). Within the gender theory, boys are more likely than girls to draw attention to their acceptance from their peer group and to masculinity behaviors regarding authority, autonomy and dominance, while girls emphasize the importance of micro-level factors, such as family and school (Warrington et al., 2000).

CONCLUSION

The present research has revealed that environment affected adolescent's achievement in all three groups. Culture did have significant effects on environment factors that may be indirectly related to individualistic or collectivistic cultural beliefs. For Albanian and Serbian adolescents, school achievement is connected to family functioning. It is possible that a cultural values system emphasizing ties to the family, as well as loyalty and obedience to family members has a positive influence on Albanian and Serbian student's achievement. Pursuing high academic achievement, adolescents may value obligations between family members and harmony within the family. In Greek sample, adolescents' perception of family cohesion and adaptability was not related to school achievement. This finding does not mean that Greeks' need for family ties is not valued, but that the domain of school achievement can be seen as a kind of adolescent's individuation achieved within the family. To summarize, these three groups may represent two different ideas of school achievement within the family context.

The regression analyses show a different pattern of relationship between the socio-demographic and family variables, and students' school achievement. In general, the influence of parents on adolescents' achievement is not limited to the family functioning, but also extends to the SES, family size and home density. Family SES affects or mediates the relationship between the family cohesion and school achievement of adolescents.

Our study has some limitations. First, we assessed school achievement, socioeconomic and demographic adversities and family cohesion by self-reports completed by the adolescents. It might be useful for future studies to employ other sources of information, such as teachers and parents, and to collect information about the school achievement of students in different waves. The second limitation concerns the limited factors included in the study. Future research can include factors such as individualism/collectivism and interdependence/independence that help to examine these dimensions with family functioning and school achievement.

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