

Levels of Family Functioning among University Students in Langata Constituency, Nairobi County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Family functioning plays a critical role in shaping students' psychological wellbeing and their ability to cope with academic demands. University students who experience inadequate family support, poor communication, or ineffective family relationships may be more vulnerable to academic burnout. The study sought to determine the levels of family functioning among University students in Langata Constituency, Nairobi County, Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive research design. The Yamane formula (1967) was applied to determine the sample size of 244 participants from the study's target population of 1007. Data was collected using a combined questionnaire incorporating the Family APGAR Scale and the Family Assessment Device (FAD). Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) with SPSS version 25. Results showed that 199 participants (81.6%) demonstrated moderate levels of family functioning, representing the largest proportion. Additionally, 23 participants (13.9%) exhibited low levels of family functioning, while 22 participants (9.4%) recorded high levels of family functioning. The study recommends to the institutions of higher learning to strengthen counseling and peer support programs in order to help the university students.

Keywords: Levels, family functioning, University students, Langata Constituency, Nairobi, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

Family functioning refers to the quality of interactions, communication patterns, emotional support, and problem-solving abilities within a family unit (Oslon, 2000). It includes qualities like flexibility, unity, and problem-solving that supports a positive family dynamic and efficient stress management among university students. Levels of family functioning can vary significantly due to factors such as parental involvement, cultural expectations, socioeconomic status, and family structure. Healthy family functioning typically fosters a nurturing setting that encourages students' emotional well-being, effective stress management, and academic motivation. According to Goodman et al. (2019) dysfunctional family relations, which are marked by emotional neglect, unresolved disputes, or inadequate communication, can contribute to stress, psychological distress, and reduced academic performance (Garber et al., 2019). As university students navigate the demands of higher education, the role of family functioning becomes increasingly crucial, potentially influencing their susceptibility to academic burnout. Therefore, designing interventions requires a grasp of these processes that support student success and mental health.

The study by Malkoç et al. (2015) aimed to examine the relationship between family functioning, psychological well-being, and resilience among university students. The target population was undergraduate students in Turkey, with a sample size of 476 students selected through convenience sampling. Using validated psychological scales, the study found that family functioning significantly predicted resilience ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.01$) and psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$), with approximately 22% of the variance in psychological well-being explained by family functioning.

Morales et al. (2020) conducted a cross-sectional analytical study in Mexico City, Mexico to examine the relationship between academic burnout and family functioning among English-speaking graduate students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data were collected online using convenience sampling technique between September 2021 and March 2022. The study surveyed 519 graduate students (master's and doctoral levels) across

universities in Hungary and other European countries. Measurement tools included the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory–Student, the Family APGAR Index, perceived social support, and coping scales. The findings demonstrated that family functioning had a direct negative effect on academic burnout, with a standardized path coefficient of -0.28 . Coping strategies also showed a negative effect of -0.26 , while perceived social support had a weaker effect of -0.12 . Additionally, the influence of social support on burnout was partly mediated by coping (-0.05) and family functioning (-0.03), both statistically significant. The study overlooked family-related and contextual influences, a gap that the current study addressed by investigating family functioning among university students.

Lee et al. (2019) conducted a study in South Korea to explore family functioning levels among university students balancing part-time employment and school responsibilities. The focus was on how family support influences students' stress management and academic achievement. The study population included undergraduate students from three public universities in Seoul, and a sample of 480 working students was chosen using proportionate stratified sampling across different faculties. The study found that 46% of students reported high family functioning, with strong emotional support, open communication, and collaborative problem-solving within the family, while 34% reported moderate family functioning, and 20% experienced low family functioning marked by family conflict, lack of parental understanding, and limited emotional support. Students with high family functioning reported better psychological well-being, lower stress, and greater academic engagement, whereas those with low family functioning experienced higher stress, emotional exhaustion, and lower academic performance. The current study was guided by prior research demonstrating that the stability and quality of family functioning significantly influence students' well-being. These findings underscored the need to examine family functioning among university students.

Similarly, Rodriguez et al. (2020) conducted a study in Spain to assess family functioning levels among university students who work part-time and how family support interacts with academic stress and work-study balance. The study population consisted of undergraduate students from two public universities in Madrid, and the researchers used simple random sampling to select 500 working students across different academic disciplines. Findings showed that 41% of students reported high family functioning, 39% reported moderate family functioning, and 20% reported low family functioning. Students from families with high levels of emotional closeness, positive communication, and shared decision-making reported lower burnout symptoms and better time management between work and studies.

Amani et al. (2018) conducted a study in Iran, to examine the relationship between family cohesion and academic burnout among university students. The aim of the study was to determine whether family cohesion could serve as a protective factor against burnout in academic settings. The target population consisted of medical students at Kurdistan University of Medical Sciences in Iran. Using a stratified random sampling technique, a total sample of 386 students was selected to participate. The findings revealed a significant negative correlation between family cohesion and academic burnout, with a correlation coefficient of $r = -0.27$ and $p < 0.001$, indicating that higher levels of family cohesion were associated with lower levels of academic burnout among the participants. This suggests that family cohesion plays an important role in students' psychological well-being and academic resilience.

Regionally, Molefe et al. (2021) conducted a quantitative in South Africa to explore the role of family cohesion and communication in reducing stress among students who were working and studying at the same time. The study population comprised undergraduate students from two public universities in Johannesburg, focusing on students who worked at least 15 hours per week while enrolled in full-time studies. A sample of 480 working students was selected using cluster sampling, where faculties were first grouped, and students were then randomly selected within each faculty. The findings showed that 38% of students reported high family functioning, 36% reported moderate family functioning, and 26% reported low family functioning. Students from high-functioning families showed better coping, less burnout, and more resilience, while those from low-functioning homes faced more stress. The study highlighted family cohesion's protective role against academic burnout.

The effect of family functioning on stress and academic performance among working university students was investigated in Ghanaian research by Osei et al. (2018). Undergraduate students from two public institutions in

Accra made up the study population. A sample of 450 individuals was chosen by simple random selection. Findings showed that 42% of students reported high family functioning, 34% moderate, and 24% low family functioning. Students with strong family support had better time management, lower stress, and improved academic performance, whereas those with poor family functioning experienced higher burnout and difficulty balancing work and studies.

Locally, research examining family functioning among students has largely focused on secondary school populations, leaving a gap in understanding its impact at the university level. However, other relevant studies in different contexts provide valuable insights that can inform research on family functioning among university students. Omae et al. (2019) conducted a study in Habaswein Sub-County, Wajir County, to examine the effects of dysfunctional family environments on students' academic performance. The aim of the study was to determine how family-related issues such as parental conflict, neglect, and lack of support influence learners' academic outcomes. The target population included secondary school students, and a sample size of 251 students was selected using systematic random sampling. The findings revealed that 64% of the respondents reported frequent parental conflicts at home, while 58% indicated lack of emotional support from their families. Additionally, 42% of students from dysfunctional family settings had experienced academic decline, and 15% had either dropped out or repeated classes due to family-related stressors. The study asserts that family dysfunction plays a major role in undermining students' academic potential. However, studies on university students in Kenya on levels of family functioning have not been largely investigated creating a gap.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive research design to examine family functioning among University students in Lang'ata Constituency, Nairobi County. The research design was suitable for the current study because it aimed to describe the levels of family functioning among the university students. The study was conducted with one of the Universities within Langata Constituency. The target population of the study was made up of all fourth-year undergraduate students who were nearing the completion of their degree programs. These students were selected because they have had prolonged exposure to family interactions throughout their university life, allowing family functioning patterns to be clearly established. At this stage, students experience increased family expectations related to graduation and career decisions, while also possessing greater maturity and reflective ability to accurately evaluate family communication, support, and problem-solving dynamics. Through stratified random sampling, the study utilized a sample size of 244 participants.

Family functioning was measured using two standardized tools: The Family APGAR Scale and the Family Assessment Device (FAD). The Family APGAR provided a quick evaluation of perceived family support through five core items, including adaptability, partnership, growth, affection, and resolve. The FAD offered a more comprehensive assessment of seven dimensions, namely problem solving, communication, roles, affective responsiveness, affective involvement, behavior control, and general functioning. The Family APGAR Scale, developed by Gabriel Smilkstein (1978), was a brief 5-item tool assessing satisfaction with family functioning. Higher scores indicated better perceived family support, making it valuable in both clinical and research settings (Smilkstein, 1978; Smilkstein, Ashworth, & Montano, 1982).

The Family APGAR Scale consisted of five items rated on a 3-point Likert scale to assess satisfaction with family functioning with a total score ranging from 0 to 10. A score of 7 to 10 indicates high family functioning, 4 to 6 suggests moderate dysfunction, and 0 to 3 reflects severe dysfunction. This simple scoring method allows for quick assessment of perceived family support and cohesion. (Smilkstein, 1978). The Family APGAR is valued for its brevity and applicability across diverse cultural settings, making it ideal for university student populations. While the Family APGAR Scale provided a quick screening of family functioning through five core dimensions, it did not capture the full complexity of family interactions. The Family Assessment Device (FAD) complemented it by offering a more comprehensive evaluation across multiple domains such as communication, roles, and problem-solving.

The Family Assessment Device (FAD), developed by Epstein, Baldwin, and Bishop (1983), was a widely used tool for assessing family functioning based on the McMaster Model of Family Functioning. It consisted of

multiple subscales that evaluated domains such as problem-solving, communication, roles, affective responsiveness, affective involvement, and behavior control. Responses were rated on a 4-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating poorer family functioning. Scores were averaged for each subscale, and a mean score above the established cut-off suggested dysfunction in that domain. The FAD demonstrated good reliability and validity, making it suitable for both clinical and research settings (Epstein et al., 1983). The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics specifically frequencies and percentages using SPSS VERSION 25. The results were presented with tables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study aimed to determine the levels of family functioning among university students in Langata Constituency, Nairobi County, Kenya. The study began by presenting the demographic of the participants followed by findings of the objective of the study.

Demographic Details of the Participants

The study utilized descriptive statistics to analyze the demographic variables generated from the demographic profiles of the participants. The analysis was carried out on the four variables: age, gender, academic program and marital status. The demographic characteristics were summarized and presented accordingly in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Details of the Participants

Demographic Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18-21	196	80.3
	22-25	48	19.7
Gender	Male	148	60.7
	female	96	39.3
Academic Program	SBE	73	29.9
	SCM	161	66.0
	BCS	10	4.1
Marital status	Single	236	96.7
	Married	5	2.0
	Separated	1	.4
	others	2	.8
Totals		244	100%

Results in table 1 shows that a larger proportion of participants were between 18 and 21 years, representing 80% (n = 196). This shows that most of the participants were in the late stages of adolescence. A larger proportion of the participants were male, 148 (60.7%), compared to their female counterparts, 96 (39.3%).

This shows that courses that are related to business, economics, computer and mathematics are pursued by male students compared to female students. The results showed that the higher proportion of participants were in academic program under the school of computing and mathematics 161 (66%) followed by participants who were in academic program under the school of business and economy 73 (29.9%). This shows that courses that are related to pure sciences are dominated by males in relation to gender. In terms of marital status, majority of participants were single 236 (96%). The results on marital status are consistent with the participants' age distribution. The fact that most participants were in the late adolescent stage explains why the majority of them were single.

Levels of Family Functioning among University Students in Langata Constituency, Nairobi County, Kenya

The objective of the study was to determine the levels of family functioning among the university students. The levels of family functioning was categorized into three levels namely low (15-29), moderate (30-44) and high (45-60). To examine the three levels of the family functioning, a descriptive statistic of frequencies and percentages was conducted and the results are presented in table 2.

Table 2: Level of family functioning among university students

Range	Indicators	Frequencies	Percentage
Low	15-29	23	9.0%
Moderate	30-44	199	81.6%
High	45-60	22	9.4%
Totals		244	100%

Results from descriptive statistics in table 2 shows that 23 (13.9%) of participants scored low in family functioning. In addition, the results showed that majority of the participants 199 (81.6%) had a moderate family functioning. Furthermore, the results showed that 22 (9.4%) of the participant's high family functioning. In overall, the results that majority of the participants had moderate family functioning.

In overall, the results showed that majority of the participants had moderate family functioning. The findings of the current study resonated with findings of Lee et al (2019) who conducted a study in South Korea to explore family functioning levels among 480 university students balancing part-time employment and school responsibilities. The study found that 46% of students reported high family functioning, with strong emotional support, open communication, and collaborative problem-solving within the family, while 34% reported moderate family functioning, and 20% experienced low family functioning marked by family conflict, lack of parental understanding, and limited emotional support.

Similarly, the currents study was consistent with findings of Rodriguez et al. (2020) who conducted a study in Spain to assess family functioning levels among 500 university students who work part-time and how family support interacts with academic stress and work-study balance. The findings showed that 41% of students reported high family functioning, 39% reported moderate family functioning, and 20% reported low family functioning. Students from families with high levels of emotional closeness, positive communication, and shared decision-making reported lower burnout symptoms and better time management between work and studies.

Furthermore, the findings were supported by the findings of Molefe et al. (2021) who conducted a quantitative study in South Africa to explore the role of family cohesion and communication in reducing stress among 480 students who were working and studying at the same time and findings showed that 38% of students reported high family functioning, 36% reported moderate family functioning, and 26% reported low family functioning.

The findings were in agreement with findings of Osei et al. (2018) who conducted a study on family functioning on stress and academic performance among 450 working undergraduate university students in a Ghana and the findings showed that 42% of students reported high family functioning, 34% moderate, and 24% low family functioning.

In addition, the findings were consistent with the findings of Omae et al. (2019) who conducted a study in Wajir County, to examine the effects of dysfunctional family environments on academic performance among 251 students and the findings revealed that 64% of the respondents reported frequent parental conflicts at home, while 58% indicated lack of emotional support from their families. Additionally, 42% of students from dysfunctional family settings had experienced academic decline, and 15% had either dropped out or repeated classes due to family-related stressors.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that majority of the participants had a moderate family functioning followed by low functioning and high functioning. In overall, the results showed that majority of the participants had moderate family functioning. The study recommends to the institutions of higher learning to strengthen the counseling programs in order to help the university students to deal with academic stress. The study also recommends that parents and guardians strengthen family functioning by promoting effective communication, emotional support, and responsiveness within the family unit. Families should ensure that students' basic needs are adequately met. Supportive and well-functioning family environments may enhance students' ability to cope with academic stress and reduce the risk of academic burnout. Also, mentorship programs where the lecturers can get involved in journeying with students can greatly help them to deal with academic stress. Students need to be encouraged to seek counseling services whenever they experience stress.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future studies may expand the research to include multiple universities and diverse geographical regions to improve the external validity of the findings. Researchers are encouraged to use mixed-method approaches by incorporating interviews or focus group discussions to gain deeper insights into students' family experiences and emotional well-being. It would also be beneficial to include inferential statistical analysis to examine how family functioning relates to academic burnout, stress, or academic achievement. Universities should strengthen counseling services, mentorship programs and peer support initiatives to assist students experiencing family-related challenges. Further research may also investigate the role of socioeconomic status, parental involvement and cultural factors in influencing family functioning among the university students.

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