

Effects of Family Communication during Mealtime to the Psychosocial Well-Being

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Abstract

Purpose in this study to explain the interaction effects of family communication during mealtimes to the relationship between the frequency of family meals and the psychosocial well-being of emerging adults. The researchers used Quantitative Designs that used qualitative interviews to support quantitative findings. The researchers used the standardized Communication Effectiveness Scale to measure how effective communication is during mealtime and the Psychological Well-Being Scale by Ryff to determine the psychosocial well-being of the respondents who are emerging adults aged 18 to 22 years old and are from Laguna and Batangas. After gathering the data, the researchers further interviewed five participants to gather data regarding family mealtimes. The data gathered were analyzed through frequency distribution, weighted mean, correlation, and moderation analysis. The results showed a significant relationship between the frequency of family mealtimes and psychosocial well-being. However, family communication during mealtime did not moderate the relationship between the predictor, frequency of family mealtime, and the outcome psychosocial well-being. The study aimed The researchers intended to specifically (1) determine the usual topic that is present during mealtimes; (2) determine the level of communication effectiveness in terms of belongingness, clarity, empathy, and non-verbal communication; (3) determine the level of psychosocial well-being of the respondents in terms of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance; (4) determine the relationship between frequency of family meals and psychosocial well-being; and (5) determine the interaction effects of family communication during mealtime to the relationship between the frequency of family meals and the psychosocial well-being.

Keywords: family communication; psychosocial well-being; emerging adults

Introduction Section

There are many traditions that are being practiced by Filipinos and one of these is the act of eating together. In the culture of Filipinos, eating is not just a way to replenish your energy and to fill their stomach, but this is the time wherein they can strengthen their communication with their family. During the pandemic, the relationship between families really changes, especially in the routines that they have done before the pandemic like how they communicate with each other or eat together. There were various restrictions that have been implemented so that the numbers of infected could be controlled. One of the restrictions that have been implemented are lockdown, work-from-home set-up and online classes for students (Üstün & Özçiftçi, 2020). Many families are stuck inside in their house, and in the research of Öngören (2021), it has been discussed that there were positive and negative outcomes that happened within the family during this time. The family may become closer because during the time that they have, they are always at home. That is why they can give more time to their children, but it could also result in domestic conflicts, communication problems and mobile addictions. In creating a healthy family life one of its foundations is having a strong family connection through communication (Robinson & Brotherson, 2016). By having open communication, parents are involved with their children's development. During the period of adolescence, conflicts between parent and child relationships have become frequent and intense, this is thought to be a way for parents and their children to negotiate their relational changes to an egalitarian relationship (Branje, 2018). Family meals encourage everyone to get together and express their views

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and ideas. It is also an opportunity to practice social skills by listening and taking turns in conversation (Denmon, 2020). Participating in family rituals such as eating meals together is said to be an important factor in creating well-being. Family members who dine together often are healthier and less prone to develop eating disorders and addictive behaviors (Offer, 2013).

References

Family Relationship during Pandemic

Various changes have occurred during this pandemic, especially when it comes to the lifestyle and relationship between members of the family. One of these is the set-up for education and work, in which both are in an online set-up. Due to this, there was an increase in periods of isolation and time spent at home (Öngören, 2021). Education Institutions also resorted to learn-from-home set-up so that students can still learn despite the events that are happening right now. These new developments have affected the family lifestyle, making it more difficult for the entire family to maintain a healthy and sustainable life (Yıldız, 2020).

In the past years, Researchers discussed that the relationship of the parents and their child is a two-way relationship wherein they have reciprocal effects on one another. As this pandemic is still ongoing, the relationship between families is also being affected both positively and negatively, and how they try to overcome the situation varies from family to family. In relation to this, the results of Öngören (2021) showed that there are positive and negative aspects in the relationship of the family members during this pandemic. In addition to that, the relationship between family members is more positive than negative during this pandemic, which shows that despite the changes and challenges that can happen, family is still essential, especially the relationship they have with each other. The positive relationships between the family show that they gave time and support to one another. Communication was also positively established as they try to be more understanding and help each other during difficulties. However, despite the positive evaluation, some families also experience negative situations like disagreements, boredom, and problems communicating due to spending extended periods together.

Frequency of Mealtime

The frequency of family meals develops positive feelings and attitudes about one's life and the family connection (Lawrence & Plisco, 2017). Adolescents who had meals with their families regularly reported stronger family bonds, more parental supervision, and improved communication with their parents (Utter et al., 2013). Family meals may have the extra advantage of encouraging happy emotions rather than merely avoiding negative ones. The regularity of family dinners may foster sentiments of belonging and comfort. Eating together may prevent adolescents from sadness and risky behaviors by providing a regular and safe setting where parents check their daily activities and connect emotionally (Musick & Meier, 2012).

Frequent family meals were significantly associated with the adolescents' perception of family relationships, compliance with parental guidance, and better psychosocial outcomes. However, further study is necessary to establish causation since there are minimal risks of encouraging families to opt for regular family meals with their children (Harrison et al., 2015). A study conducted in Hong Kong identifies the risk factors of infrequent family meals due to older age, separated/divorced/ widowed parents, and less educated fathers that lead adolescents to develop risky behaviors and can worsen family function (Wong et al., 2021).

According to research done by (Offer, 2013), teenagers reported increased positive affect and engagement and less stress when they ate meals with both parents, as compared to when they did not. Similar correlations were seen while having meals only with the father. Eating meals with the mother showed a more limited association with well-being, being associated with only engagement.

Frequency of Mealtime

Regular parent-adolescent communication is an essential first step to reducing stress in the parent-adolescent relationship (Wong et al., 2021). Which expressive families were more likely to enact the following everyday talk categories: small talk, joking around, catching up, recapping the day's events, reminiscing, making up, love talk, relationship talk, serious conversations, talking about problems, decision making, making plans, and asking a favor (Burns & Pearson, 2011). A study conducted in Canada indicated that family dinners might benefit adolescents' well-being. Links between family dinners and mental health are partially attributable to the ease of communication between adolescents and parents. (Elgar et al., 2013)

Often, when a teenager does not understand the essential meaning of a message, the responsibility is with the parent, who failed to understand and chose the least acceptable mode of communication with their child. Proper communication is critical in the parent-child relationship, even more so if the parents want to establish a more effective means of conveying to their children the essential life principles that will lead them in the present and particularly the future (Runcan et al., 2012).

The time spent with family is usually short because of the busy schedule. However, the opportunity to connect and check up with the other family members, especially their children, comes through family meals (Musick & Meier, 2012). In addition to this, communication during mealtime allows an opportunity to adequately convey their thoughts, ideas, stories, and experiences with their family. Through this situation, deep and meaningful connections are formed and strengthened within the family (Gonzales & Vargas, 2021). In connection to this, according to Eisenberg et al. (2004), as cited by Fruh et al. (2011), discussion of family history during mealtime makes the children feel that they have stronger bonds with the member of their family, higher self-esteem, and greater sense of control over their lives. This is also the opportunity to know what is happening with their lives, properly guide them with their difficulties, and talk about their future. It is also the time to show their affection to their children and how much they care for them (Asnan et al., 2014).

Effects on Psychosocial Well Being of the Children in the Family

Psychosocial well-being is a broader concept that encompasses emotional or psychological well-being, as well as social and collective well-being. "Quality of life" is identical with psychosocial well-being in that it encompasses emotional, social, and physical components. (Eiroa- Orosa, 2020)

A family meal is essential in a child's life as this can be when they can communicate with their parents, especially regarding their difficulties or concerns. Eating meals together can also promote the thinking that they can lean on their parents, and the parents can also be more aware of what is happening to the well-being of their children. In connection to this, Fulkerson et al. (2008), as cited by Prior & Limbert (2013), discussed that family meals serve as an opportunity where each family member can have the time to communicate and lean on each other. Various research in the past also discussed that Family meals could positively influence the well-being of adolescents, such as being emotional support, learning proper communication skills, and manners. Since adolescents enjoy autonomy, they are also expected to show filial piety, meaning to show the attitude of obedience, devotion, and care toward one's parents and elderly family members. Disagreements between teenage personal choices and parental beliefs and expectations may negatively influence adolescent psychological well-being (Wong et al., 2021).

Adolescence is the crucial stage of development as this is when they need to learn how to solve interpersonal conflicts and youth adaptation. According to Brannen & O'Brien (2002), as cited by Armstrong-Carter & Telzer (2020), the adolescent stage is when the child transitions towards autonomy and invests more time towards peers. Through eating together with their family, they could maintain and strengthen the bond with their family. In connection to this, family Meal provides an excellent environment for adolescents as they feel more connected to their family, giving them a sense of belongingness and emotional support (Fruh et al., 2011).

Emerging Adulthood

In the Study of Arnett (2015), the word "emerging adult" describes a person aged 18- 29 years old. This is a person's transition from being an adolescent into an adult. It discussed that emerging adults have different

features from adulthood and adolescence. There are five features in emerging adulthood, (1) *Identity Explorations*, where they seek their identity, try different life choices, and decide what they want to do. (2) *Instability*, emerging adults, are usually involved in different life-changing plans. The plans that they once had usually changed as they discover new things. During this revision, they also learn new things regarding themselves (3) *Self-focus*, as they transition into adolescence and young adulthood, they slowly build the foundation for their adult life and better understand life and themselves. This is when they learn to stand alone and make a life-changing decision by themselves (4) *Feeling in between*, being in this stage, they get confused on what stage they are in when they encounter some situation. Their attitudes as adolescents sometimes emerge even though they want to be an adult in a situation. Lastly, the (5) *Possibilities and Optimism*, as there will be multiple futures that they can imagine, dreams that they want to attain, sometimes these things are usually not attained, and drastic changes are experienced.

The transition from adolescence to adulthood is a critical time at the same time. It is a unique period, as this is when a person is not adolescent anymore, but at the same time, they are still not an adult. In this stage, they experience life-changing choices, like leaving their home to become independent, what they would choose for their education path, or will they already work. They also encounter more social interaction with new people, which sometimes challenges their social skills (Jorgensen & Nelson, 2018).

Gender

Males and females reported the same social benefits associated with family meals, such as increasing family togetherness and assisting in stress reduction; however, males perceived family meals to be more stressful on average, and the perception that meals were stressful or unpleasant was associated with lower ratings of the importance of family meals among females but not males (Prior & Limbert, 2013).

In the previous research of Eisenberg et al., (2004); Fisher et al. (2007), Sen (2010), and Fulkerson et al. (2006) as cited by Asnan et al. (2014), there were different results regarding the effects of family meals towards adolescence development in terms of their gender. Eisenberg et al., (2004) and Fisher et al. (2007) reported that there is a strong effect towards the girls while the latter two researchers said that there is no difference in the effects between the genders.

Figures and tables

Table 1. *Frequency of Family Meals*

Frequency of Family Meals	Frequency	Percent
We do not eat together	7	7.3
Once a week	5	5.2
2 times a week	7	7.3
3 times a week	6	6.3
4 times a week	3	3.1
5 times a week	8	8.3

6 times a week	4	4.2
7 times a week	56	58.3
Total	96	100

Table 1 shows the frequency of Family Meals; 58.3% answered that they eat together *seven times a week*, and 3.1% answered that they eat together with their family *four times a week*. Frequently eating together has been a long tradition that Filipinos have been doing. These results show that the tradition of eating together has been done up until now, especially during the pandemic. In addition to that the participants also described eating together as a way to strengthen the bond of the family members with each other and there are instances wherein not eating together as a family could lead to problems. According to Anne Fishel, eating meals together as a family at least four times a week benefits a child's development. Frequent family dinners are related to improved mental health. Parents who shared meals regularly reported more robust levels of family functioning, increased self-esteem, and decreased depressive symptoms and stress (Fishel, 2021).

Table 2. *Frequency of Topics in a Family Mealtime*

Topics	Frequency	Percent
No Communication	35	36.5
Current Events	40	41.7
Daily Activities	31	32.3
Past Events	32	33.3
Future Events	41	42.7
Common/Personal Interests	48	50

Table 2 shows the frequency of topics in a Family Mealtime, 50% responded that they usually talk with their family about *common or personal interest* and 32.3% talk about the *daily activities* that they do. The results demonstrate that the topic of the conversation during family mealtime is usually about common interests. This suggested that as the participants are in the age of emerging adults, the usual topic that the family discusses with them is something that they will be needing in the future and that can help them in connecting to society. Parents familiar with the state of emerging adulthood are more equipped to assist their emerging adult children in successfully navigating this critical life period, therefore preparing the foundation for a good parent-adult-child connection. Emerging adulthood is a time of intensive self-discovery (Goldsmith, 2018). This exploration of self-identity encompasses the development of adult identities and capabilities for love and work and the clarification of worldviews and beliefs.

Table 3. *Summary of Communication Effectiveness*

Dimensions	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
Belongingness	5.32	1.02	Slightly Agree
Clarity	4.84	1.01	Slightly Agree
Empathy	5.00	1.19	Slightly Agree
Non-verbal Communication	5.20	1.26	Slightly Agree

Legend: 6.50-7.0=Strongly agree; 5.50-6.49=Moderately agree; 4.50-5.49=Slightly agree; 3.50-4.49=Neutral; 2.50-3.49=Slightly disagree; 1.50-2.49=Moderately disagree; 1.00-1.49= Strongly disagree

Table 3.5 shows the summary of the level of Communication Effectiveness, Belongingness has a (M=5.32, SD=1.02), Non-verbal Communication has a (M=5.20, SD=1.26), Empathy has a (M= 5.00, SD= 1.19) while clarity has a (M= 4.84, SD=1.01). The results show that they all have verbal interpretation of *Slightly Agree*. Communication is effective when there is a *sense of belongingness* in the conversation, as long as they are involved with the topic. Involvement on the topic of conversation, emerging adults will most likely stay at the dinner table since it may concern them as well in the future. When an individual is able to feel that they belong to a certain group or community it enhances their pleasure, confidence (Drolet et al., 2013), and has a greater sense of life meaning (Lambert et al., 2013). While in the sense of *clarity*, it may be effective yet there may be parents that are unable to explain clearly what they want to convey during the conversation, which can cause misunderstanding or miscommunication. In addition to that even though most of the participants eat together with their family this does not guarantee that they are complete during mealtimes due to busy schedules or conflicting schedules of both parents and as well as their children.

Table 4. *Summary of Psychosocial Well-Being*

Dimensions	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
Autonomy	4.41	0.92	Neutral
Environmental Mastery	4.77	1.02	Slightly Agree
Personal Growth	5.12	1.05	Slightly Agree
Positive Relations with others	5.06	1.02	Slightly Agree
Purpose in Life	5.00	0.99	Slightly Agree
Self-Acceptance	4.64	1.11	Slightly Agree

Legend: 6.50-7.0=Strongly agree; 5.50-6.49=Moderately agree; 4.50-5.49=Slightly agree; 3.50-4.49=Neutral; 2.50-3.49=Slightly disagree; 1.50-2.49=Moderately disagree; 1.00-1.49= Strongly disagree

The table 4.7 shows the summary of the level of the Psychosocial Well-Being, Personal Growth has a (M= 5.12, SD= 1.05), Positive Relations with others has a (M= 5.06, SD= 1.02), Purpose in Life has a (M= 5.00, SD= 0.99), Environmental Mastery has a (M=4.77, SD=1.02), Self-Acceptance has a (M= 4.64, SD=1.11) while Autonomy has a (M=4.41, SD=0.92). The results show that they all have a verbal interpretation of Slightly Agree excluding Autonomy which is interpreted that respondents of the study are Neutral in this dimension. In the Psychosocial Well-being it mainly affects the emerging adults *Personal Growth* in which the highest mean score in that dimension is that there is continuous learning, changing, and growth (Baggio et al., 2017) whenever they engage during family mealtimes. *Autonomy* is the lowest dimension that affects the psychosocial well-being of the respondents, emerging adults have a tendency to think and analyze first the argument before stating their opinions. Although they may say that they aren't afraid to voice their opinions but rather choosing their arguments to avoid miscommunication or any misunderstanding within their family.

Table 3. Correlation Analysis between Frequency of Family Meals and Psychosocial Well-Being

		Frequency of Family Meals	Interpretation
Autonomy	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	0.316** 0.002	Moderate, direct significant
Environmental Mastery	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	0.221* 0.03	Weak, direct significant
Personal Growth	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	0.208* 0.042	Weak, direct significant
Positive Relations with others	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	0.326** 0.001	Moderate, direct significant
Purpose in Life	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	0.241* 0.002	Weak, direct significant
Self-Acceptance	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	0.316** 0.002	Moderate, direct significant

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

There is a moderated *direct significant relationship* between frequency of family meals and the dimensions of psychosocial well-being, mainly the positive relations with others, $r = 0.33, p = 0.00$. while frequency of family meals and the personal growth has a weak direct significant relationship, $r = 0.21, p = 0.04$. The dimension, positive relations with others, assesses the extent of having satisfying relationships with others. The connection between the two variables suggests that the frequency of family meals is essential in building the psychosocial well-being of emerging adults, especially in building relationships with others. The frequent family meals help

the emerging adults in developing their social skills. While personal growth, which refers to the extent to which an individual uses their talents and potential, shows a weak connection with the frequency of the family meals. The family meals still contribute to the development of personal talents. This weak connection may suggest that there could be another factor that could strongly affect personal growth development. These results also imply that as the frequency of family meals increases, the participants' psychosocial well-being increases. Even though the frequency of family meals could not fully explain or affect the psychosocial well-being of emerging adults, family meals are still contributing to the development of their well-being.

The present finding confirms that the frequency of family meals is essential in building the psychosocial well-being of emerging adults. This result may have also been affected by the conflicting schedules of the family in which this may lead to misunderstanding between parent and their child since there is only limited time in which they would consider themselves that they were able to bond with each other as a family. This is supported by the comprehensive review of Harrison in which it demonstrates that frequent family dinners benefit children and adolescents' psychosocial development and that Parents' and teens' hectic schedules are frequently cited for fewer family meals (Harrison et al., 2015).

Table 4. Moderation Analysis between Frequency of Family Meals and Family Communication

Predictor	β	P	Lower CI	Upper CI
Frequency of Family Meals	0.04	0.85	-0.33	0.41
Family Communication	0.64	0.19	0.15	1.12
Frequency of Family Meals x Family Communication	0.00	0.09	-0.07	0.07

The results of this table highlights that there is no significant interaction effect, $\beta = 0.00$, 95% CI [-0.07, 0.07], $p = 0.09$, indicating that the relationship between frequency of family meals and psychosocial well-being is not moderated by family communication. The findings suggest that Communication during family meals does not strengthen or weaken the connection between family meals frequency and psychosocial well-being. As the participants of the study are emerging adults, they are conflicted about how they will behave in accordance with their already mature age yet being looked at by others as still young-minded. This may be due to emerging adults exploring whether they would be dependent on their parents or be independent. The respondents' sample number may also affect the results as to why there are no interaction effects between the variables. As the sample size of the research study is small, it could be that 96 respondents are not enough to observe the interaction effects of family communication during mealtime. According to Ali Memon et al. (2019), when sample variance is less than population variance, even by a negligible amount, the statistical power to detect moderating effects is significantly reduced. This implies that the sample size of the study may not have been enough to detect moderating effects.

Statistical Treatment

The statistical treatment for the quantitative design where the frequency, mean and standard deviation, correlation, and moderation analysis was utilized. Correlational analysis is a method to measure the degree of association between the variables, if they have close association or not (Senthilnathan, 2019). In this study, the

researchers found out the association between the frequency of the family meal and psychosocial well-being. For moderation analysis, it tested if the moderation variable affects the relationship between the independent and dependent variable and how it strengthens or weakens the relationship of the variables. The concept of moderation analysis discusses when or under what conditions the changes occur. This model showed the within-level interactions of the variables in which the first interaction is the direct effect of the frequency of family meals on psychosocial well-being. It also established the relationship between the two variables without the moderating effect. The second interaction was the moderating effect of the moderating variable on the relationship between frequency of family meals and psychosocial well-being. The second interaction showed how the moderating effects alter the relationship between the two variables (Dawson, 2014).

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