

SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH REPORT

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PERCEPTION OF MENTAL HEALTH AND FREEDOM

**TEAM MEMBERS : Dania periyan, Sarah Adham, Tisha Lasrado**

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** The current research analyzes the concept of youth and freedom, underscoring its enormous elasticity and high social importance in today's expansionist culture. the researchers of this study administered a self-developed questionnaire to assess the aims. Approximately, 75 participants between ages 15-18 were recruited of which the majority were female participants. The average age of the sample was 17 years. The current studies design is that of a questionnaire/interview type. The overall outcome of the investigation depicts that a majority of the sample have difficulty in opening up about mental health-related topic to their parents (58%, SD=1.5) despite being fairly social (40%, SD=10.7). Furthermore, the results displayed a higher outcome for not having a scheme to going out (77%, SD=19.5), with a lower response to 'having a scheme' (23%, SD=19.5).

**Research topic:** Understand youth culture and their extent to "freedom" with different family values.

**Aim:**

To understand the different views of freedom from different age groups and cultures(in families).

**Hypothesis:** the recent generation has differences in values compared to the traditional ideological perspective. This raises a conflict between age groups such as parents and children/teenagers.

**Keywords:** youth culture, freedom, family values, mental health, culture

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## SAMPLE AND METHODS

**Research Method and design:** The method used in this research is a questionnaire style interview. The questionnaire was kept online as a result of the latest pandemic, and to be prudent and aware of the current situation, the participants agreed to request an online questionnaire, as parents were asked for interviews instead of outsiders.

### Questions for Questionnaire (sample):

1. How old are you ?
2. Are you social?
3. What's your nationality ?
4. Do you believe your parents are supportive of your wants and needs?
5. Do you find it easy to open up to your parents about mental health or stress issues?
6. If not, why do you believe so?
7. Do you believe your parents treat you with constraints on you compared to your siblings/ or gender?
8. If so, why?
9. Is there a scheme for your outings
10. Do you believe your friends influence the way your parents react to certain situations, such as going out?

### Questions for Interview (sample):

1. How do you define the term 'freedom'?
2. According to you, if you had a boy child and a girl child, would you believe you'd treat them the same or different in the context of freedom, say they were to go out late? Or stay long hours outside?
3. What does mental health mean to you, how do you define the term?
4. Do you find it hard to control as well as provide freedom?
5. Results prove that children still feel suffocated at home, what do you believe causes this?
6. How important is religion, prayer and family values important in developing stable children? Do you believe these matters and if they don't exist they produce dysfunctional children?
7. Do you make it a necessity to spend time with your family and check in with them regularly (daily). How can you fill your family with love and support?

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## Introduction

"Freedom" is a primary requirement in human development. It is a central component of humanisation, as seen from both the species viewpoint. Freedom more or less refers to the ability to do as one pleases, eliminating any restrictions. Although there is a limited interpretation of what freedom is, it comes in several definitions that vary between families and their values.

The Youth culture According to Sociological terms is defined as "a smaller group of young adults that share common traits, who exist alongside the larger extent of society, causing no harm". The establishment of youth culture- consists of young adults whereupon certain beliefs, values, are used to demonstrate the formation of one's identity that are usually distinguishable from adult personalities. Individuals from a specific youth culture develop a sense of belonging that can be viewed as an escape from reality. ( reality- existence within a repetitive system ). They face difficulties trying to gain acceptance which is almost all they require. Understanding the dynamic of how a youth culture functions can be complicated, what is witnessed amongst youngsters is the strive for " freedom". Some psychologists have suggested that the creation of a youth community is an effort to create an ideology that reconciles these two contradictory expectations. For example, Parsons (1951) argued that adolescence is a period when young people are shifting from parents to autonomy.

The principles of morality and discipline are usually taught within a family, how to behave, what is expected out of you depending on your age or gender. Values are essential due to the fact that they provide the cornerstone as a means of security, encouragement, guidance, love and support. Instilling family values will shield and direct children from making hurtful choices in the future as they teach a sense of right and wrong which will contribute to the making of a peaceful society. In addition to numerous social values of which include respect, acceptance as well as politeness, these aspects are undergone through the act of "primary socialization " -an unwritten concept enforced on individuals during the period of childhood.

Rebellion is part of human growth in young adults so that they can establish their parents' or family's identity and their independent decision-making ability. As part of this phase of identity formation, they will undergo various positions, conducts and ideologies. The teenage rebellion has been identified within psychology as a collection of behavioural characteristics that supersede class and society.

The main assumption focuses on it being " rebellious " more of behaviours that of which is not approved by societal standards. The rebellion which takes advantage of the " freedom" is normalized for young people to have the ability to experiment with the boundaries set by authorities. Such an experience ( going against the laws) can further put things into perspective meaning despite not being the legal age of any sort of sentencing, juvenile delinquency plays a role in shaping the consequences.

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## Body

Associations of young people and the word freedom frequently build a negative picture of how youth communities work. Youth culture is the boundary process of learning how personality is created, of discovering precisely where you belong. "Young people" is the finalization of being a citizen of society, an appropriate participant. Youth culture is of great importance to many cultures, now why youth culture is important: "Culture can transform whole cultures, to reinforce local communities and to forge a sense of identity and belonging for people of all ages.

As a vector for youth growth and civic engagement, culture plays a vital role in fostering inclusive social and economic development for future generations."

"Freedom" many claim that their recourse to freedom resides inside communities that have shared similarities, a position where you can express yourself without fear of being judged. This specific topic was chosen due to the rise in youth facing mental instability in the current years and whether we are at home (especially due to being in quarantine) whether family impacts this mental instability.

### **Statistics on the increase of mental instability among children and youth:**

- *Increased mental instability statistics: 20% of adolescents may experience a mental health problem in any given year. 50% of mental health issues are reported by 14 years of age and 75% by 24 years of age.*
- *10 %of children and young people (5-16 years of age) have a clinically diagnosable mental health condition, yet 70 per cent of children and adolescents who have mental health issues have not had effective interventions at an early age.*
- *Even before COVID-19, the prevalence of mental illness among young adults had risen. In 2017-2018, 19 % experienced mental illness, a rise of 1.5 million compared to last year's dataset.*
- *Between 1993 and 2014, the number of people with common mental health issues rose by 20% in both men and women. The number of people experiencing serious mental health problems in any given week increased from 7% in 1993 to more than 9% in 2014.*
- *In 2017-2018, 19% of adults experienced mental illness, a rise of 1.5 million compared to last year's dataset. The concept of suicide among young adults is growing.*

Mental wellbeing problems can be an incredibly painful and upsetting time for the whole family and can have a significant effect on the interpersonal aspects of the family. When it comes to

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mental disorders, the social and behavioural implications for family members are largely neglected. The mental health issues of individuals have implications for people within their social networks, especially their families.

Looking after a family member with a mental illness can be an incredibly difficult period and dealing with stress can trigger different reactions such as somatic issues (migraines, lack of appetite, exhaustion, insomnia), neurological and emotional problems (anxiety, depression, remorse, panic, frustration, confusion) and behavioural problems (change of mood and social withdrawal).

Increasing data indicate that dysfunctional family dynamics can trigger stress, have an effect on mental health, and also cause physical symptoms. Analysis has shown that non-supportive families can undermine someone's mental wellbeing or cause a mental disorder to intensify.

Many findings suggest that individuals with a stronger sense of self-determination are socially more healthy, are more likely to have good health, are healthier and are more likely to have better social ties. Although self-determination is important in our lives, it becomes essential in our adolescence. In other words, I like my own "perspective" as a teenager (to have an opinion about what I do and care about). I like my own "peers" (to decide who I'm with and when). And I want to have my own "place" (to be placed without adults around me.)

These teenage urges can be frightening to parents. As teenagers want to do the contrary, the implicit adult brain signals "risk" and we tend to fear or feel irritated.

In certain instances, this terror is well established. Teenagers should not have the same capacity to make choices as adults. They are less likely to notice and plan threats. They lack the ability of an adult to control themselves

They are more likely to value peer relationships over education, wellness, and sometimes even physical protection. This suggests that parents who strongly limit their adolescents' ability to make decisions can well prevent any issues in the short term.

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## **Cultural effect**

Research questions like, 'What is your nationality?' include an understanding of whether a factor such as culture influences how the participants respond to the rest of the questionnaires.

For example, South Asian parents may be more strict and unwelcome to talk about mental health. But the parents of western culture could be more lenient and understanding to address the matter.

Or also in terms of equality, in some societies, parents might be taught to educate their children in a stricter, more limited and more disciplined way, provided that freedom is an unwanted aspect of the child's upbringing. As for other parents in another culture, independence can be an important consideration for a healthy childhood and a very important impact on a child's mental health.

Also, questions like this one, "According to you, if you had a boy child and a girl child, would you believe you'd treat them the same or different in the context of freedom, say they were to go out late? Or stay long hours outside?" asked the parents of teenage girls, which has some sort of cultural impact.

In certain cultures, a male child has more privilege than a female child, and while this concept is melting away, there are a few adherents and adherents of this traditional practice.

Gender variations in the degree of independence or approval that boys and girls receive when living in a family household. 8% of young people aged 18 to 24 who live with their parents say they can't come home late at the time they want, 13% say they can't stay the night out.

However, these general data include wide-ranging disparities between young men and women:

11% of girls are not allowed to come home at any time compared to 6 per cent of boys; 19% of girls are not allowed to stay the night out compared to 8 per cent of boys.

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## **Contribution of parents**

Parents have a lot to worry about when it comes to their children, And much when youth have to respond to their parents or peers, they have to respond to culture and social expectations, and the thought of trying to justify why their child is, say, not following a more traditional education or profession is frightening.

This is another explanation. Fear falls into play mainly because they have far fewer options than we do now. If you recall some movies from their day, it usually revolved around a man, looking for a career, then something. It was what it was like back then, and the safety and protection of a decision that is demonstrably "secure" and "healthy" is something that they favour over an attitude to you-can-do-what-you-want-in-life.

Factors that could make parents more strict these days could also be due to increased violence and illegal activities. Hanging out with the wrong people, doing the wrong things, all have an effect on society as a whole. No parent needs their youth to be young. Crime backgrounds will also demolish their credibility, making it impossible for young people to get a career.

That's why, in terms of freedom, many parents prefer to be more vigilant to have a mind that it's safer to be safe than to be sorry.

The study includes an interview with parents about how much 'freedom' is enough and what freedom means to them individually as a parent.

Most parents' motives are not to be wretched or inconsiderate with their offspring. But they want the best for their children. Parents need to ensure that their children do not regret the mistakes they have made in their youth and that they do not become a danger to society. But to be effective and contribute to the peace and harmony of the world and reverence for the people who live in it.

Parents have now seen and lived through their childhood and young adult years, they have more knowledge of what to do and what not to do. They see the world in a far more mature way than their teenage ones. Which makes them wiser and gives them a deeper understanding of the world.



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## **RESULTS: questionnaire (answered by adolescents)**

### **1) Gender**

A majority of the responses were received from females and less than half of the responses came from male participants.

This suggests the responses could be slightly gendered biased; since there are more female respondents, responses gathered is likely to be more emotional and intuitive (due to biological differences)

### **2) Age**

Responses were collected from participants of ages 15 to 18, with around half of the sample aged 17 and the rest were 16 and 18. However, only 2 respondents were aged 15.

Our target population was teenagers and so the sample used was fairly representative of that and therefore generalizable.

### **3) Nationality**

Most of the respondents were Indian and the next larger ethnic groups involved were Sri Lankans, Pakistanis, Filipinos and Egyptians. Some participants were American, Canadian and Dutch.

This diversity gives way for highly generalizable and representative results. It can also provide a reason for the answers given by a certain ethnic cohort of participants.

### **4) Sociability**

Participants were asked to rate their sociability on a scale of 1 to 5.

This was asked to discover the socialness of an individual impacted their freedom and lifestyle.

A majority of the respondents claimed to rate their sociability 3 out of 5 or 4 out of 5. This is likely to provide the research high levels of validity since respondents are likely to be more open and give more detailed answers about their social life.

### **5) Spending time with parents/family**

Participants were asked if they often spend time with their parents or as a family. Examples were given (weekend activities, get-togethers) to provide clarification.

A great number of participants replied yes, while some answered no.

The option of 'other' was given and the few who selected this were required to specify and elaborate.

These responses suggest that the majority of teenagers' value family time or bonding with their family members and, accordingly, are likely to be closer to their parents and/or siblings.

### **6) Opening up to parents**

Next, to understand the participant's relationship with their parents, respondents were asked if they found it hard to open up to them about issues surrounding mental health.

The responses given were almost an equal ratio of yes and no (50% for each). This balance in vote suggests that not all teenagers necessarily move towards one – not all teenagers are open nor closed off about their mental health and stresses.

This question is connected to the following.

### **7) If yes (easy to talk to parents), why would it be hard?**

This was an open-ended question requiring those who answered yes to explain why they find it hard to open up and seek guidance/advice from their parents. Responses were varied, however, many respondents mentioned the lack of understanding of their problems.

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8) If yes, what makes your parents easy to talk to?

This was also open-ended and aimed to seek the qualities their parents and their relationship held and how that contributed.

Many responses included words like understanding and supportive. This suggests that these qualities allow the parents and children to be open to discussions on all topics, including sensitive ones.

9) Treatment compared to siblings

This was a closed-ended question to see if the parents of the individual held any biases towards a certain child/sibling.

Most respondents answered yes, implying equal treatment amongst siblings.

A small percentage of the respondents thought otherwise or did not have a sibling. This implies that most parents express their love and discipline their children equally.

10) If no, why is it hard to talk to your parents?

This question was open-ended and required participants who answered no previously to explain and elaborate on their response.

**Most results gathered showed that**

11) Outing details

This closed-ended question was asked to prompt participants to reveal if their family outings are structured. Family outings are different from other outings with friends and for special occasions since the individuals automatically have their parent's consent to join, and so we will use this to compare and contrast with the other responses.

Most individuals responded no.

12) Influence of friends

The question was open-ended and aimed to uncover the parents' impression of the individual's friends.

This would help us find a connection between relationship with friends and relationship with parents and if they two correlates (a healthy and close relationship with friends means a healthy and close relationship with parents and consequently more freedom granted)

Mixed answers were given, suggesting that it differs from case-to-case.

13) Year group

The question required respondents to select their year group or grade.

A major percentage of respondents were from year 12 and 5-6 participants were from the year above and below. This could lower the representativeness of our research, as the responses may not apply to the other high school year groups.

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## RESULTS: interview (parents)

- 1) How do you define the term 'freedom'  
Parents responded by saying that freedom can freely think and make choices (right or wrong) without any boundaries.
- 2) According to you, if you had a boy child and a girl child, would you believe you'd treat them the same or different in the context of freedom, say they were to go out late? Or stay long hours outside?  
1 out of 3 parents reported that they would treat a male and a female child differently, that they would be more lenient to a male and more stringent to a female.
- 3) What does mental health mean to you, how do you define the term?  
2 out of 3 responded to this inquiry. Both parents who responded had difficulty constructing sentences on the concept of mental wellbeing, but had straightforward responses about what it meant to them.
- 4) Do you find it hard to control as well as provide freedom?  
2 in 3 parents said no. 1 of the 2 claimed that it was because, as a parent, they had instilled a free atmosphere with a set of boundaries. 1 of the 3 parents said that it was difficult to regulate as well as to offer independence and argued that children today have a lot more experience and would like to make choices of their own rather than making decisions with their parents.
- 5) Results prove that children still feel suffocated at home, what do you believe causes this?  
All three parents had separate reasons for this issue:  
  
Parent 1 -Teenagers are lazy, and their outlook about some problems is not optimistic, which is why parents must direct them.  
Parent 2 - Peer pressure, invalid facts, loss of contact with the extended family, lack of a proper support group, and parents are busy and difficult to deliver.  
Parent 3 - Children need contact with society, particularly in their own age group, and when you are nurtured in a family environment, you already know how each person responds, how they behave and how they behave. As a society, though, we learn how to communicate with people, interactive abilities, cognitive learning and, most notably, social behavior.
- 6) How important is religion, prayer and family values important in developing stable children? Do you believe these matters and if they don't exist they produce dysfunctional children?  
All three parents accepted that religion, prayer and family values are vital for the development of healthy children. And it can only be positive. One parent claimed that while the values of the family are vital and should strive to be maintained, if the youth actually breaks these family values, this will mean that the values of the family are evolving and have a more modern impact on it.
- 7) Do you make it a necessity to spend time with your family and check in with them regularly (daily). How can you fill your family with love and support?  
All 3 parents said it was important and that compassion and care is demonstrated when their children seek help or are going through a difficult time in their lives.

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## CONCLUSION

Conclusively, the research conducted suggests that there exists a cultural gap in the understanding of freedom and mental health. The results display a curve towards imitating globalized ideologies of youth freedom (schemes to go out), but such an understanding is very much limited to accepting mental health-related issues and concerns among today's society.

The gender gap and different age groups have different perceptions on the idea of freedom and mental health. It is often hard to define the line and understand each other's perspectives as everyone has different values and beliefs even within a family.

Our hypothesis highlights the difference and conflict between perspectives of freedom from the side of the parent and the side of the children/teenagers. The results reflect this to an extent - particularly responses from the child/teenager's view.

It can be concluded that, from the viewpoint of the teenager, the freedom given by the parent is based on their personal relationship with them as well as the parent's opinion on the concept of freedom or what they believe is best for their child.

On the other hand, our research can be improved by collecting more responses from the parents and gaining their understanding of the situation, their beliefs and detailed point of view.

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