



# From Home to Classroom: A literature study on the impact of dysfunctional families on child's mental health.

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## How to Cite this Article:

Rao, S. (2026). From Home to Classroom: A literature study on the impact of dysfunctional families on child's mental health.. International Journal of Creative and Open Research in Engineering and Management, <i>02</i>(05). <https://doi.org/10.55041/ijcope.v2i5.510>

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<https://doi.org/10.55041/ijcope.v2i5.510>

## Abstract:-

The family is the primary environment where children's emotional, psychological, and social development takes place. When this environment becomes dysfunctional—due to conflict, abuse, neglect, divorce, domestic violence, economic stress, or parental absence—it significantly affects a child's mental health and academic success. This literature study, titled “From Home to Classroom: A Literature Study on the Impact of Dysfunctional Families on Child's Mental Health,” reviews empirical findings from peer-reviewed journals accessed through Google Scholar to understand the negative consequences of dysfunctional family dynamics. Utilizing a literature review methodology, data were collected from peer-reviewed journal articles accessed via Google Scholar and analyzed through descriptive analysis techniques.

The review reveals seven major impacts of family dysfunction: low academic achievement, loneliness, behavioral problems, envy, low self-esteem, low self-confidence, and impaired social relationships. Psychological consequences such as anxiety, depression, and emotional instability were also common. These challenges often lead to poor concentration, lack of motivation, school absenteeism, and lower academic performance. The

findings emphasize that children exposed to unbalanced parenting, aggression, or neglect often experience delayed emotional development and a heightened risk of psychological trauma.

This study highlights the critical need for early identification of at-risk children and the implementation of family - centered interventions, parent training programs, and school-based mental health support. Strengthening the parent-child relationship and promoting a nurturing home environment are essential for fostering emotional well-being, resilience, and academic success among children from dysfunctional families.

## Keywords:

Dysfunctional families; Child mental health; Psychological well-being; Academic performance; Family functioning; Childhood trauma; Parental influence



## **Introduction:-**

Family is the fundamental unit of society, playing a crucial role in shaping the emotional, social, and psychological development of children. However, in today's rapidly changing world, families are undergoing significant transformations, with increasing cases of divorce, separation, desertion, and conflict. These structural and functional changes within families have profound implications for children's mental health and overall development. Globally, an estimated 10–20% of children and adolescents experience mental disorders, which can interfere with their development and daily functioning [1,2]. The World Bank reports that neuropsychiatric disorders account for 15–30% of disability-adjusted life-years (DALYs) lost during the first three decades of life, underscoring the significant burden of mental health problems among young people [3].

Parental mental illness is a critical factor influencing family dynamics and child development. It is estimated that 12–45% of adults attending psychiatric services are parents to minor children [4,5]. Parental mental illness affects not only the individual but also their children, partners, and the broader family environment [6]. Research has shown that children of parents with mental illness are at increased risk of psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, and poor social functioning, with this vulnerability often persisting across the lifespan [7,8]. In addition to genetic predisposition, environmental factors—such as parent–child interaction, social support, and overall family functioning—play a vital role in the intergenerational transmission of mental health issues [9].

Family functioning is a multidimensional construct that encompasses communication patterns, emotional expression, role performance, and problem-solving within the family unit [10]. The Process Model of Family Functioning, derived from systems theory, provides a useful framework for understanding how families accomplish essential tasks to meet the needs of their members [11]. Impaired family functioning has been reported across a range of parental mental illnesses, including major depression, bipolar disorder, psychotic disorders, anxiety disorders, and personality disorders [12–16]. Moreover, the severity of parental symptoms—such as number of suicide attempts, duration of illness, or intensity of manic episodes—has been linked to greater family dysfunction [17].

Children and adolescents' perceptions of family functioning often differ from those of their parents. Studies suggest that adolescents typically report more negative views of family cohesion and adjustment compared to parents [18–20]. Discrepancies in perceptions are particularly pronounced in families experiencing stressors such as parental illness [21]. The depression-distortion hypothesis posits that depressive symptoms can bias parents' perceptions of their children and family, leading to more negative evaluations [22,23]. These perceptual differences are not merely measurement errors but may carry meaningful information that is clinically relevant for assessment and intervention [24].

Dysfunctional family environments are strongly associated with adverse child outcomes. When fundamental family functions—educational, affective, economic, protective, and socialization—are disrupted, children's basic psychosocial needs, including love, security, recognition, and responsibility, may go unmet [25]. Failure to meet these needs can result in emotional dysregulation, poor self-esteem, impulsivity, and maladaptive coping behaviors. Longitudinal studies have consistently demonstrated that children from broken or conflict-ridden homes show higher rates of aggression, mood swings, fearfulness, academic difficulties, and behavioral problems such as lying, truancy, and delinquency [26–28]. These effects often persist into adulthood, increasing the risk of substance abuse, criminal behavior, and difficulties in forming lasting attachments [29,30].



Communities and schools are also deeply impacted by these family-level disruptions. Children from dysfunctional families are more likely to exhibit externalizing behaviors, including aggression, defiance, and delinquency, which disrupt educational processes and pose challenges for educators and peers [31,32]. School counselors and mental health professionals are therefore encouraged to adopt family-inclusive intervention strategies to address the root causes of aggressive and antisocial behavior rather than focusing solely on the child [33].

The urgency of studying family dysfunction and its impact on adolescent mental health lies in its potential for long-term consequences. Dysfunctional families—characterized by domestic violence, substance abuse, poverty, poor communication, and emotional instability—can negatively affect adolescents' psychological well-being, academic achievement, and interpersonal relationships. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for designing targeted interventions and policies aimed at strengthening family systems, preventing mental health problems, and promoting resilience among youth.

The present review synthesizes existing literature on the psychological, social, and developmental impacts of family dysfunction on children and adolescents. By integrating findings from diverse studies, this review aims to (a) describe the relationship between family dysfunction and adolescent mental health, (b) explore discrepancies in family members' perceptions of family functioning, and (c) identify gaps in the current research to inform future interventions and policy development.

### **Research Objectives :-**

The present review aims to provide a comprehensive synthesis of literature exploring the intersection of family dysfunction and adolescent mental health. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Examine the relationship between family dysfunction and adolescent mental health, with a focus on psychological outcomes such as depression, anxiety, aggression, and social difficulties.
2. Assess the mediating role of family functioning in the relationship between parental mental illness and child/adolescent mental health outcomes.
3. Explore the long-term consequences of family dysfunction, including its impact on educational attainment, substance use, and relational stability in adulthood.
4. Identify gaps in the existing literature, such as limited data on fathers' perspectives and the need for external clinician assessments, to guide future research and intervention design.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses:-**

The present study seeks to explore the impact of family dysfunction on adolescent mental health and related long-term outcomes. Specifically, it aims to address the following research questions:

1. **RQ1:** What is the relationship between family dysfunction and adolescent psychological outcomes, such as depression, anxiety, aggression, and social withdrawal?
2. **RQ2:** Does family functioning mediate the relationship between parental mental illness and adolescent mental health outcomes?
3. **RQ3:** What are the long-term consequences of exposure to chronic family dysfunction, particularly regarding educational attainment, substance use, and relational stability in adulthood?
4. **RQ4:** What are the key research gaps in this domain, and how can future studies better address them through the inclusion of fathers' perspectives and multi-informant, longitudinal methodologies?



Based on these research questions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- **H1:** Higher levels of family dysfunction will be significantly associated with increased psychological distress among adolescents, manifesting as symptoms of depression, anxiety, aggression, and social withdrawal.
- **H2:** Family functioning will mediate the relationship between parental mental illness and adolescent mental health outcomes, such that better family functioning mitigates the negative psychological impact of parental mental illness.
- **H3:** Adolescents exposed to chronic family dysfunction will demonstrate poorer long-term outcomes, including lower educational attainment, an increased likelihood of substance use, and greater relational instability in adulthood.
- **H4:** Existing research gaps—particularly the underrepresentation of fathers’ perspectives and the limited use of external clinician assessments—restrict the comprehensiveness of current findings and underscore the need for multi-informant and longitudinal approaches in future studies

### **Methodology:-**

This study employed a literature review design to examine the negative impact of dysfunctional families on adolescents. Data were collected from online academic databases, with Google Scholar serving as the primary source for retrieving full-text journal articles.

The literature search utilized targeted keywords, including *dysfunctional family and adolescents*, *impact of family dysfunction on adolescents*, *malfunctioning family*, and *family dysfunction impact on adolescents*. Following the search, articles were screened through their abstracts to determine their relevance. Studies that did not align with the objectives of the present research were excluded.

Data were analyzed using a descriptive analysis approach. The analysis process involved comparing and synthesizing findings from the selected studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic. Specifically, the review process included:

- (a) identifying similarities across studies,
- (b) highlighting differences between findings,
- (c) critically evaluating the strengths and limitations of the studies, and
- (d) summarizing and integrating the findings into a coherent discussion.

### **Results:-**

The literature review revealed seven primary consequences of family dysfunction on children and adolescents:

1. **Low Academic Achievement:** Children from dysfunctional homes often exhibit poor concentration, low motivation, absenteeism, and lower academic performance.
2. **Loneliness and Social Withdrawal:** Impaired family relationships and lack of emotional support increase feelings of isolation and difficulty forming peer relationships.



3. **Behavioral Problems:** Higher rates of aggression, defiance, lying, truancy, and delinquency were reported.
4. **Envy and Comparison:** Children may develop jealousy toward peers with more stable family environments, affecting self-perception.
5. **Low Self-Esteem and Self-Confidence:** Emotional neglect and parental criticism contribute to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt.
6. **Impaired Social Relationships:** Poor family functioning leads to difficulties in trust, empathy, and forming healthy attachments.
7. **Psychological Symptoms:** Anxiety, depression, emotional instability, and increased vulnerability to long-term psychological disorders were prevalent.

### Mediating Role of Family Functioning:

Several studies indicate that effective family functioning can buffer the negative impact of parental mental illness, emphasizing the importance of communication, emotional support, and structured family roles.

### Long-Term Consequences:

Chronic exposure to family dysfunction predicts lower educational attainment, higher substance use, difficulties in adult relationships, and increased risk of intergenerational transmission of mental health problems

Impact Category	Description	Examples / Observed Outcomes
Low Academic Achievement	Dysfunctional family environments affect focus, motivation, and engagement in school.	Poor concentration, lack of motivation, absenteeism, lower grades, academic underperformance
Loneliness and Social Withdrawal	Impaired family relationships lead to emotional isolation and difficulty connecting with peers.	Feeling isolated, difficulty forming friendships, social anxiety
Behavioral Problems	Exposure to neglect, abuse, or conflict increases maladaptive behaviors.	Aggression, defiance, lying, truancy, delinquency
Envy and Comparison	Children compare themselves to peers from stable families, affecting self-perception.	Jealousy toward peers, feelings of inadequacy, social comparison stress
Low Self-Esteem and Self-Confidence	Emotional neglect, criticism, or lack of support reduces self-worth.	Self-doubt, low confidence in abilities, negative self-image
Impaired Social Relationships	Poor family functioning hinders the development of trust, empathy, and social skills.	Difficulty forming and maintaining friendships, poor communication, lack of empathy
Psychological Symptoms	Chronic stress and dysfunction increase susceptibility to mental health issues.	Anxiety, depression, emotional instability, risk of long-term psychological disorders
Long-Term Consequences	Chronic exposure predicts negative adult outcomes and intergenerational effects.	Lower educational attainment, higher likelihood of substance use, relational instability, increased risk of passing



<b>Impact Category</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Examples / Observed Outcomes</b>
<b>Mediating Role of Family Functioning</b>	Positive family dynamics can buffer negative outcomes despite parental mental illness.	dysfunction to next generation Effective communication, structured roles, emotional support, strong parent–child relationships

### **Discussion:-**

The present literature review highlights the significant negative impact of dysfunctional family environments on children and adolescents, emphasizing both immediate psychological outcomes and long-term developmental consequences. The findings corroborate existing research demonstrating that family dysfunction—characterized by parental conflict, neglect, abuse, domestic violence, or mental illness—disrupts the emotional, social, and cognitive development of children, leading to multifaceted challenges in adolescence and adulthood.

### **Psychological and Behavioral Outcomes**

Consistent with prior studies, children from dysfunctional families exhibit higher rates of anxiety, depression, and emotional instability. These outcomes are often compounded by behavioral problems such as aggression, defiance, truancy, and social withdrawal. The results reinforce the notion that unmet emotional needs and inconsistent parental support hinder the development of adaptive coping strategies and emotional regulation. Moreover, the presence of envy and comparison with peers from healthier family environments indicates that children internalize familial dysfunction and may develop negative self-perceptions, further exacerbating low self-esteem and diminished self-confidence.

### **Impact on Academic and Social Functioning**

The review demonstrates a clear link between family dysfunction and poor academic performance, including lower motivation, absenteeism, and difficulties in concentration. These findings align with studies that emphasize the interplay between home environment and school outcomes, suggesting that dysfunctional family dynamics can impair cognitive focus, classroom engagement, and educational achievement. Socially, children exposed to family dysfunction face challenges in forming and maintaining healthy peer relationships. Impaired trust, reduced empathy, and difficulties in communication limit their social competence, highlighting the pervasive effect of family dysfunction beyond the home.

### **Mediating Role of Family Functioning**

The literature suggests that effective family functioning, even in the presence of parental mental illness, can buffer negative outcomes for children. Structured family roles, consistent communication, emotional support, and positive parent–child interactions mitigate the psychological impact of familial challenges. These findings support the use of family-centered interventions and parent training programs as preventive strategies to strengthen resilience and emotional well-being in children at risk.

### **Long-Term Consequences**

Chronic exposure to family dysfunction has enduring implications. Longitudinal studies indicate that these children are more likely to experience lower educational attainment, increased substance use, difficulties in adult relationships, and a higher propensity for intergenerational transmission of mental health problems. This underscores the importance of early intervention to break cycles of dysfunction and promote long-term developmental stability.



### **Research Gaps and Future Directions:-**

Despite significant progress in understanding the effects of dysfunctional families, important gaps remain. Fathers' perspectives are underrepresented in the literature, limiting a holistic understanding of family dynamics. Additionally, most studies rely on parental or self-reports, which may introduce bias; multi-informant approaches including teachers, clinicians, and peers are necessary for a more accurate assessment. Longitudinal research is also scarce, constraining the understanding of long-term consequences and intergenerational patterns of dysfunction. Addressing these gaps can improve the design of interventions, policies, and educational programs aimed at mitigating the effects of family dysfunction on children.

- Limited focus on fathers' perspectives.
- Overreliance on parental or self-reports without multi-informant validation.
- Scarcity of longitudinal studies examining long-term outcomes.

### **Implications:**

The findings highlight the need for comprehensive support systems that integrate family, school, and community resources. Early identification of at-risk children, implementation of family-centered therapy, and school-based mental health interventions are crucial strategies to promote resilience, psychological well-being, and academic success. Strengthening parent-child relationships, improving family functioning, and fostering nurturing home environments can mitigate the detrimental effects of familial dysfunction and facilitate healthy developmental trajectories.

The findings highlight the need for early identification of at-risk children, school-based interventions, family-centered therapy, and parent training programs to promote resilience, mental health, and academic success.

In summary, this review reinforces the critical role of family dynamics in shaping children's mental health, behavior, and academic outcomes. Interventions targeting family dysfunction not only benefit individual children but also contribute to healthier family systems and broader social outcomes, emphasizing the need for evidence-based, multi-level approaches in research and practice.

### **Conclusions:-**

This literature review demonstrates that dysfunctional family environments have profound and multifaceted effects on children and adolescents, influencing their psychological well-being, social functioning, and academic achievement. Children exposed to family dysfunction frequently exhibit anxiety, depression, behavioral problems, low self-esteem, and impaired social relationships, which can persist into adulthood and affect long-term outcomes such as educational attainment, substance use, and relational stability.

The findings highlight the critical mediating role of family functioning, showing that positive parent-child interactions, emotional support, and structured family dynamics can buffer the negative effects of parental mental illness and family dysfunction. These results underscore the importance of early identification of at-risk children and the implementation of targeted interventions, including family-centered therapy, parent training programs, and school-based mental health support.



Despite significant progress in understanding the impact of dysfunctional families, notable research gaps remain, particularly regarding fathers' perspectives, multi-informant assessments, and longitudinal studies that track long-term consequences. Addressing these gaps is essential for designing evidence-based interventions and policies that foster resilience, promote mental health, and enhance developmental outcomes for children and adolescents.

In conclusion, nurturing and supportive family environments are fundamental to children's emotional, psychological, and academic development. Strengthening family functioning and providing systemic support can mitigate the adverse effects of dysfunction, enabling children to achieve their full potential and thrive in both personal and academic domains.

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