

Family mealtime frequency and adolescent development



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Family Mealtime Frequency and Adolescent Development Cross-sectional and Longitudinal Studies: A Comparison Much of adolescent development directly correlates to the social interactions between adolescents and the people with whom they spend the most time. It is therefore logical to explore the relationship between adolescents and their families to better predict their behavioural development. When conducting developmental research there are two most established ways of studying the subject population. The first is a cross-sectional study, which studies different aged cohorts at one given time. The second is a longitudinal study, which follows one set of subjects over a long period. Both of these methods were deployed in different studies to find the correlation between adolescent family mealtime and the occurrence of risk taking behaviours. A cross-sectional study, entitled Family Dinner Meal Frequency and Adolescent Development: Relationships with Developmental Assets and High-Risk Behaviors, was published in 2006. In the academic year of 1996-1997, an anonymous survey went out to just under 100, 000 students grades 6 to 12. They investigated the frequency of family mealtime by asking how many times all the members living at home eat together per week; they recoded the answers into three groups, 0-1, 2-4, and 5-7. To assess the behavioural aspects they asked the students to rate their level of 16 different internal and external assets, such as positive identity and boundaries, respectively. Additionally, the students were asked to evaluate their involvement with 10 different risky or negative behaviours such as substance abuse, depression, eating disorders etc. This study demonstrates that healthy behavioural assets, such as the aforementioned, inversely relate to risky behaviours. Additionally and most importantly, frequency of family mealtime coincided with this inverse

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relationship. They found that a feeling of support and familial connection indicates positive development. To the same extent, infrequency in family mealtimes indicates a probability of a large range of negative behaviours. Since the sample size was so large, random, and self-selected by the schools, the sample includes many different socio-economic classes as well as ethnicities and races. However, all the demographic variables were controlled; the study's findings were still significant. Without controlling the variables, adolescents who reported high frequency family mealtimes had almost double the score in positive assets, although it did drop slightly after controlling for demographic and familial variables. However, the high frequency students' odds of risky activity were almost half of the low frequency and did not fall when controlled. Amongst the results, the researchers note that males report having family mealtimes more frequently, and perhaps more expected, the younger cohort, grade 6-8, report a higher frequency of family mealtimes rather than the grade 9-12 cohort. Family support and a positive view of personal future rank the highest with approximately 75% of subjects in the high frequency group stating they felt this strongly. Moreover, fewer adolescents in the high frequency category state involvement in any of the 10 negative behaviours compared to any other frequency groups. Another study, entitled Family Meals and Substance Use: Is There a Long-Term Protective Association?, was published in 2008, this one longitudinal. The survey was first distributed in the 1998-1999 academic year to adolescents with the mean age of 12. 8, then again five years later in the academic year 2004-2005 to the same adolescents now with a mean age of 17. 2. The subject size was relatively much smaller, approximately 800. This study limited its concentration on the frequency of <https://assignbuster.com/family-mealtime-frequency-and-adolescent-development/>

family mealtimes with correlation to substance use only. Five or more family mealtimes per week are considered regular frequency, or to use the previous study's term — high frequency. The adolescent's feeling of family connectedness was also measured on a scale of how much the subject agreed with statements about their relationship with their parents. Finally, substance use was measured by asking questions on frequency of use in the past 12 months, ranging from never to daily. The study did find a significant trend but curiously only with females. Female adolescents, when compared with their baseline, are twice as likely to partake in substance use later on when they report infrequent shared family mealtimes. The male population's odds were not significant when compared to baseline use. Perhaps this could be because females react to more subtle emotions; therefore, they notice the family support during mealtime, more so than males. There is very different methodology involved in the two studies. The cross-sectional study consisted of a much larger sample size, 99, 462 subjects in total. In addition, it took place in 25 different U. S. states. The survey itself had numerous questions on a wide variety of behaviours. The survey encompassed 26 behaviours in total, including both positive and negative assets and behaviours. The supplementary information provides a fuller picture of the relationship being assessed. The longitudinal study had a much smaller sample size, only 806 students, after dropout rate. Additionally, the study only took place in one city, Minnesota. The students participated, first, while in public school approximately at the age of 12, then again by mail at the age of approximately 17. The analysts then collected the new information, compared it to the baseline, and adjusted for family connectedness and previous substance use. This method gives a more accurate report of the <https://assignbuster.com/family-mealtime-frequency-and-adolescent-development/>

development of adolescents because it shows true change from one state to another. Both methodologies have their strengths and weaknesses. The longitudinal takes a lot of time to execute. It is also very expensive and had a large dropout rate due to the significant passage of time. However, unlike the cross-sectional method, it actually depicts developmental patterns and allows for a truer assessment. It is clear, now, why both methods of research exist for the same subject matter. Together researchers can see a more complete picture, and correlations that are more accurate.

Works Cited

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