

## FAMILY GATHERINGS AND FUNCTIONALITY IN FAMILIES WITH ADOLESCENTS

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**Marija Đorđević, Marina Matejević**

University of Niš, Faculty of Philosophy, Department of Pedagogy, Serbia

**Abstract.** *Although it is considered that the independence of a child during adolescence is a crucial moment, it is very important to, in addition to the newly acquired individuality, preserve cohesiveness as a feature of a healthy family atmosphere. Cohesiveness is also one of the two main dimensions of patterns of family functioning. In observing a healthy atmosphere, we started from the assumption that family gathering routines and rituals play a significant role. This research was guided by a systemic approach to understanding the meaning and significance of family gathering routines and rituals. The aim of the research was to examine family gatherings and the functionality of the contemporary family with adolescents and to determine their relationship. The Family Cohesiveness and Adaptability Evaluation Scale, FACES IV (Olson, Gorall and Tiesel, 2006), as well as The Family Gathering Routines and Rituals Questionnaire, FGRRQ specifically designed for the purposes of this research were used as instruments. The research included 204 respondents - high school students and university students. The results showed that families with adolescents in Serbia are characterized by balanced patterns of family functioning, but gatherings are not largely present. Family gatherings are statistically significantly associated with balanced patterns of family functioning. A slightly weaker connection with patterns of family rigidity and enmeshment was also found. A negative association between family gatherings and patterns of disengagement and chaos indicates the importance of gatherings for family functionality. The correlations show that family gatherings contribute to a sense of connection, because in families where gatherings are not present sufficiently patterns of disengagement are more prominent, indicating a lack of togetherness, which is problematic for the educational function of the family.*

**Key words:** *Adolescents, family functioning, gatherings, rituals, routines.*

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**Corresponding author:** Marija Đorđević

University of Niš, Faculty of Philosophy, Ćirila i Metodija 2, 18000 Niš, Serbia

E-mail: [marija.djordjevic@filfak.ni.ac.rs](mailto:marija.djordjevic@filfak.ni.ac.rs)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The family as a system, a complex, multidimensional phenomenon, cannot be treated as a simple sum of its individuals. As a unique system, the family is based on the multiple contexts of interaction and communication with the environment. The family has a tendency towards constant change, as well as establishing balance, especially in situations where the balance is disturbed (Đukić, Milosavljević and Bogavac 2017, 11).

The family, as well as the individual, go through qualitatively different phases over time which are defined by a unique series of individual and interpersonal phenomena. The life cycle phase of a family with an adolescent is an emotionally challenging time for even the most stable families.

Part of parental anxiety about adolescence undoubtedly stems from erroneous stereotypes about adolescents as difficult, oppositional, and moody. But, in itself, adolescence is a period in which there are dramatic changes in physical, cognitive, emotional, and social competencies. In addition to adolescence leading to sudden transformations in children, these transformations occur just as parents are going through new psychological problems in their lives, brought about by middle age, which makes adolescence even more challenging for both the parents and the adolescent himself (Steinberg and Steinberg 1994, 103–104).

In many families, puberty can create an emotional distance between the adolescent and the parents. As children mature from their childhood to mid-puberty, the distance between parents and adolescents increases, and conflict intensifies (Laursen, Coy, and Collins 1998; Paikoff and Brooks-Gunn 1991). Adolescents also bring a new cognitive framework into family conversation, decisions, and argumentation, and thus reconsider the functioning of the family in discussions and decision-making (Steinberg and Silk 2002, 140). The social reality of the family comes under the critical scrutiny of the adolescent, because the process of developing critical thinking and creating one's own frame of reference enables the young person to compare the family reality with the reality of the immediate social environment (Zuković 2012). The increased responsibility, independence, and freedom that accompany the transition from childhood to adulthood, associated with gaining an adult physical appearance, lead adolescents to need to be treated more like adults. Parents may not be willing to give the adolescent the autonomy or independence they seek, which will lead to conflict over rules and regulations. Adolescent physical, cognitive and self-defined changes are accompanied by developmental transitions in the social circle. Socially, adolescents become less interested in spending time with their parents, instead directing their social interest and energy toward their peers of the same and opposite sex.

While general psychoanalytic perspectives on adolescent development (e.g., Freud 1958) suggest that a healthy adolescent's task is to "separate" from his parents, that parent-adolescent conflict is necessary, and that adolescent separation is a desirable outcome of the process, modern models see conflict far from inevitable, linking the intense conflict of adolescents and parents with problematic development, and seeing the healthy end point of a family transition to adolescence as one in which the adolescent developed a sense of individuality within the context of a close, not distant family relationship (Steinberg and Silk 2002, 111).

The new balance (between independence and cohesion) is one in which a healthily individuated adolescent (responsible, independent, competent) enjoys a warm, close relationship with the parents who have allowed an increase in the adolescent's autonomy. In this process, Steinberg and Silk (2002, 112, 126) consider the role of the family and home

as an environment that protects the adolescent from harm as very important. What works most expressively and protectively is the teenager's sense of connectedness with his parents and family, feeling loved by his parents.

## 2. FAMILY FUNCTIONALITY

By applying the general theory of the system to the family and its functioning, it is very important to emphasize that the family as a system operates through transactional patterns consisting of repeated interactions that determine the pattern of behavior. In this research we relied on the Circumplex model (Olson and Gorall 2007; Olson 2011) according to which family functionality is viewed through two major and an additional dimension. The main dimensions of family functionality are cohesiveness and flexibility. Family cohesion is the balance between communion and separation. Family flexibility or adaptability is the balance between stability and change. Medium levels are more functional than more extreme levels. Extreme levels are dysfunctional patterns – these are disengagement, enmeshment, rigidity and chaos. The communication dimension is considered an ancillary dimension. Communication is taken as a necessary element for the realization of the previous two dimensions. Balanced systems have quite good communication, while the communication in unbalanced systems is very poor.

Functional family systems in the dimensions of adaptability and cohesiveness are characterized by a tendency towards stability, maintaining a balance, but also the need to adapt to certain life circumstances, as well as the existence of a connection and maintaining a relational community that is nurturing and supportive, but with respect for individual differences, which provides an opportunity for individual development and the realization of the educational function of the family (Matejevic, Todorovic and Jovanovic 2014).

In the research of family relations in Serbia today, emotionality and closeness in the relations between family members are mostly emphasized (Draganić-Gajić, Stamenković-Rudić 2004, Zotović et al. 2008, Todorović and Matejević 2012), but also a tendency towards unbalanced, dysfunctional patterns, i.e. with enmeshed and chaotic relations (Matejević 2009; Gačić, Trbić and Marković 2004; Draganić-Gajić and Stamenković-Rudić 2004; Mihić 2005). These changes were understood as the strength of the family and a response to the wider social state of insecurity. The crisis that exists in society is reflected in the way the family functions, and additionally increases the dysfunction of family systems.

## 3. FAMILY GATHERING ROUTINES AND RITUALS AND THE MODERN FAMILY

In order to consider a family as functional in terms of flexibility, it must be characterized by stability, which means (e.g. Dallos and Draper 2010): predictable, consistent rules, roles and patterns of interaction, stable structure and rituals and routine.

Each family has its own way of routinizing its daily life, as well as rituals that have a highly symbolic function and are specific to each family. Family routines are the most obvious family practice, and family rituals include a representative component of the symbolic meaning. Family practices and representations are a part of family routines and rituals and serve to highlight how the culture, the family life cycle, and individual characteristics intersect and shape the whole family (Sameroff and Fiese 2000, 387).

Fiese and colleagues (2002, 382) pointed out the main difference between routines and rituals: "When routines are disrupted, it is a hassle. When rituals are disrupted, there is a threat to group cohesion". Routines typically involve instrumental communication, and information that "this is what needs to be done". Routines are clear and visible family activities; we can say – automatism in family. Rituals, on the other hand, involve symbolic communication and convey "this is who we are" as a group. Rituals also provide continuity in meaning across generations with the sense of belonging, and the anticipation for repeat performance and an investment that "this is how our family will continue to be". Smit (2011) consider family memories a core element of family rituals. We can illustrate the difference with mealtime as an example. The routine of mealtime may include instrumental communication about who buys groceries for lunch, or who sets the table, or washes the dishes after lunch. Once these actions have been completed, there is a little thought of them. This action can be repeated several times per week. A meal ritual, on the other hand, involves a conversation in a group that may include inside jokes, symbolic objects, and actions significant for the family members only, and cannot be easily detected by an outside observer.

The modern family has responded to the challenges of time by transforming its structure, relationships, and function. A characteristic of modern times is "a strange disharmony in the relations of an individual with the wider community and society" (Bulatović 2012, 66). In contemporary society in transition, the parents' professional involvement, the education system and its development trend often do not go hand in hand with family gatherings and cohesiveness. Milosavljević (1985) believes that the contemporary urban family has positive effects on adolescents' behavior in proportion to their daily gatherings. Contrary to the "hot-dog" style of interaction (short-lived intense communication or quick need-fulfillment), which is produced by the modern rhythm of life in urban areas, and which has a tendency to robotize, to program human emotionality and human social interaction, a family gathering is an opportunity for a family to confront these challenges.

We consider important research that contributes to understanding the position of the individual in the family as well as discovering the elements that contribute to the functionality of the family today. One aspect of such research in our country is based on the theoretical concept of the SOPUS index - the index of daily family gatherings of the urban environment (Milosavljević 1985). In one such study by Milosavljević and Dušanić (2007), according to the self-statements of adolescents, the modern family in which they live together gathers sometimes, 1-2 times a week. Milosavljević categorizes this frequency as an insignificant daily gathering of the family.

### 3. THE METHOD

The subject of the research was the relationship between family functioning patterns and family gathering routines and rituals. The aim of the research was to examine the family gatherings and the functionality of the contemporary family and determine their relationship. The tasks of the research were to:

1. Examine the prevalence and characteristics of adolescent family gathering routines and rituals;
2. Examine the prevalence of functional and less functional patterns of family relationships in primary adolescent families;

3. To determine the connection between routines and rituals of gatherings and adaptability of the family;
4. To determine the connection between routines and rituals of gatherings and cohesiveness of the family;
5. To determine the connection between routines and rituals of gatherings and family satisfaction;
6. Determine the connection between routines and rituals of family gatherings and communication.

The research variables were: family functionality (adaptability, cohesiveness, communication and satisfaction) as the independent variable, and family gathering routines and rituals as the dependent variable. The sample included 204 pupils and students from the Nišavski district (the Southern and Eastern Serbia), up to 25 years of age. The sampling method was convenience sampling.

The sample has the following characteristics: it predominantly includes females (65%), and the majority of the sample consists of high school students (73%), while a smaller part consists of university students (27%).

In this research we used a descriptive method, scaling, and two instruments. The first instrument was the FGRRQ – Family Gathering Routines and Rituals Questionnaire – designed specifically for the purpose of this research.

The Family Ritual Questionnaire (Fiese 1992) was used, based on Wolin and Bennett's dimensions of ritualization (Wolin and Bennett, 1984). The FRQ (Family Ritual Questionnaire) assesses the degree of family rituals according to seven settings, ranging from dinner time to cultural traditions and eight dimensions, ranging from appearance to symbolic significance. For the purposes of this research, only the first two settings were chosen – lunch time and weekends, and from the dimensions – appearance, roles, routines, symbolism, and continuity. Also, within this scale, the SOPUS scale (Milosavljević, 1985) was partially used, which measures the daily gathering of the urban family through participation in common meals, conversations, walks, work, etc. In addition to this scale of 17 items, at the end of the FGRRQ there is 1 multiple choice question about the atmosphere during a shared meal. For the purposes of the research, in the FGRRQ questionnaire respondents are expected to retroactively recall routines and rituals from the ages of seven to seventeen (fifteen) in order to achieve uniformity of statements and avoid possible current new habitations with roommates, partners, living independently, and the like. All of the scale items are listed in Tables 4 and 5 in the next section. Cronbach's alpha value is high, above 0.7 (0.91).

The second instrument was FACES, the Family Cohesiveness and Adaptability Evaluation Scale, IV revision (Olson, Gorall and Tiesel 2006).

The theoretical basis of this scale is the Circumplex model of David Olson's marital and family system. The questionnaire is designed to measure family Cohesiveness and Adaptability as the central dimensions of this model. The questionnaire is intended for self-assessment of all family members who are older than 12. The questionnaire contains eight scales. The scales of unbalanced family relations are: Disengagement, Enmeshment, Chaos and Rigidity, along with the scales of Family Communication and Family Satisfaction. The questionnaire contains 62 items. The scales in both instruments are Likert-type scales (1 – I completely disagree, 5 – I completely agree).

Representative items of the questionnaire are:

Balanced cohesion – Family members are supportive of each other during difficult times.

Balanced flexibility – In our family, the parents are equal as leaders.

Disengagement – Our family rarely does anything together.

Enmeshment – Family members are too dependent on each other.

Rigidity – There are strict consequences if someone in our family breaks the rules.

Chaos – We never seem to get organized in our family.

Communication – Family members can talk to each other calmly about problems.

Family satisfaction – Your family's ability to resolve conflicts.

Cronbach's alpha value is high, above 0.7 (0.83).

The research was realized during the 2019/2020 school year. The research was conducted in the high school "Bora Stanković" in Niš, while the measuring instrument was forwarded via social networks to the students of the Faculty of Philosophy. The respondents were free to send the link to their peers, students, and pupils from the region. The survey was completely anonymously and on a voluntary basis.

Regarding the sample, it predominantly includes females, which is shown in Table 1. Female respondents make up 65%, and male respondents 35% of the total number of respondents. The reason is that part of the sample consists of students of pedagogy, and the population of students of pedagogy usually consists mostly of female students.

**Table 1** Characteristics of the sample by sex

	Frequency	Percentage
Male	71	34.8
Female	133	65.2
Total	204	100.0

Regarding the age of the respondents, as shown in Table 2, the majority of the sample consists of high school students, 73%, while 27% of the sample are university students.

**Table 2** Characteristics of the sample by age

	Frequency	Percentage
14-18	149	73.0
19-25	55	27.0
Total	204	100.0

For the analysis of the results, quantitative data processing, qualitative analyses, and comparison of the obtained data with the set tasks and hypotheses, as well as with the results of previous research were used. Data processing was performed using the program SPSS for Windows 20.0.

#### 4. THE RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

At first, we examined the functionality of the families with descriptive statistics applied to the dimensions of family relationships.

From the Table 3 we can see the estimates of family relationships are predominantly high on features that benefit functional families. The results are not in line with some previous research (Matejević 2009; Gačić et al. 2004; Draganić-Gajić and Stamenković-Rudić 2004;

Mihić 2005) according to which families are mainly characterized by enmeshed and chaotic patterns of functioning. On the other hand, the results agree with some of the recent research on the functionality of students' families in Serbia (Todorović and Matejević 2012; Matejević, Todorović and Jovanović 2014), where balanced cohesion and balanced flexibility are also the dominant patterns in the family functioning. Cohesion was somewhat lower than expected, but not significantly, which the authors ascribed to the developmental phase of the students.

**Table 3** The presence of functional and less functional patterns of family relationships in primary families of adolescents

	AS	SD
Balanced Cohesiveness	3.87	0.77
Balanced Flexibility	3.43	0.73
Disengagement	2.58	0.70
Enmeshment	2.26	0.56
Rigidity	2.51	0.62
Chaos	2.45	0.71
Balanced Communication	3.82	0.86
Satisfaction with Family	3.91	0.67

In our research, in the dimension of cohesiveness, it can be noticed that disengagement is more pronounced than enmeshment in family relationships, which can be interpreted by the fact that most of the sample consists of high school students currently in a phase of development which includes gaining independence and the accompanying rebellion.

Taking into consideration that the patterns in Serbian culture emphasize community the most, it is clear that the lack of closeness and community can easily be linked to the depressive reactions of adolescents, for example (Matejević, Jovanović and Ilić 2015; Hughes and Gullone 2008), or with substance abuse problems among adolescents (Matejević, Jovanović and Lazarević 2014), which implicates that emphasizing closeness and community has a protective function in some way.

The representation of gathering routines and rituals is presented in the following table.

**Table 4** The representation of gathering routines and rituals

In my family ...	AS	SD
1. ... we all agree on issues important to my family on a daily basis	3.82	1.109
2. ... we all work together every day in the apartment / house	3.38	1.187
3. ... we all gather together at the time of visiting friends every day	3.44	1.283
4. ... we all gather together during the visit of relatives every day	3.90	1.216
5. ... we all participate in family gatherings every day	3.52	1.176
6. ... we all have breakfast together every day	2.70	1.385
7. ... we all have lunch together every day	3.59	1.349
8. ... we all have dinner together every day	3.27	1.452
9. ... we all spend weekends together regularly	3.39	1.260
10. ... everyone has their specific role and task during lunch and its preparation	2.88	1.381
11. ... lunch is at the same time every day	2.72	1.546
12. ... lunch time is more than a meal, it has a special meaning	2.80	1.384
13. ... lunch time takes place in pretty much the same way throughout the year	3.76	1.253
14. ... everyone has a specific task to do during the weekend	3.01	1.335
15. ... there is a set of routines and regular events during the weekend	2.67	1.308
16. ... joint activities during the weekend have a specific meaning	2.87	1.369
17. ... weekend activities have remained fairly unchanged over the years	3.08	1.299

The values of the arithmetic mean indicate that the respondents on average partially agree with most of the statements, and the statements with which they agree the most are: *In my family: ... we all agree on issues important to my family on a daily basis...; we all gather together during the visit of relatives every day*, and: *... lunch time takes place in pretty much the same way throughout the year*.

Respondents least agree with the statement that *... there is a set of routines and regular events during the weekend*; on average, the respondents were indecisive about this statement.

Based on the data, it is clear that the estimates of routines and rituals of family gatherings are higher when it comes to gatherings for the purpose of preparing for and visiting relatives, and less when it comes to a set of established routines. This can be explained by an adequate pattern of functioning that is appropriate for families with adolescents who are maturing and in which parents respect the opinion of their children, so children in turn participate in family gatherings outside the inner circle of the family. It is understandable that at this stage of the life cycle there are no established routines, because children become independent and enrich their lives with new routines and rituals outside the family.

We notice that family gatherings are present in families with adolescents, even a little more than we expected based on research by Milosavljević and Dušanić (2007), whose results showed that the modern family gathers sometimes, 1-2 times a week, which Milosavljević categorizes as small (insignificant) daily family gatherings.

However, unlike the results of e.g. U.S. national surveys from the 1990s, which showed that 9 out of 10 families believe it is more important than ever to sit as a family during a meal (Gallup Organization 1997; according to Fiese et al. 2002, 383), the results of our study show that families with adolescents in Serbia do not consider lunch time to be more than a meal and to have a special meaning. Families do not seem to see lunch time (breakfast and dinner) as an opportunity to maintain stability and togetherness in the family.

The last question in the Family Gathering Routines and Rituals Questionnaire (FGRRQ) referred to the atmosphere during the shared meal, where the respondents were offered four answers. The response frequencies are shown in the following table.

**Table 5** Atmosphere during the meal

	Frequency	Percentage
Especially pleasant	50	24.51
Particularly uncomfortable	4	1.96
Sometimes uncomfortable	17	8.33
Usual atmosphere	133	65.20

Most of the respondents perceive the atmosphere during a joint meal as normal, and another quarter of the respondents perceive it as especially pleasant. The remaining dozen respondents perceive the atmosphere during meals as sometimes unpleasant, and the authors of some studies from around the world interpret similar findings with the possibility that family rituals can cause family conflict (Leach and Braithwaite 1996).

The data in Table 6 provide an introduction to the analysis of the correlations between family gathering routines and rituals and the dimensions of family relations. The data show the connection between patterns of family functioning and the atmosphere during meals.



**Table 6** The connection between patterns of family functioning and the atmosphere during meals

Patterns of family functioning	Atmosphere during meal	AS	SD	F-test	p	df
Balanced Cohesiveness	especially pleasant	4.3486	.46193	40.676	.000	203
	particularly uncomfortable	1.7143	.30861			
	sometimes uncomfortable	2.8824	.63333			
	usual atmosphere	3.8883	.67037			
Balanced Flexibility	especially pleasant	3.7457	.89111	17.545	.000	203
	particularly uncomfortable	1.6071	.21429			
	sometimes uncomfortable	2.8992	.50951			
	usual atmosphere	3.4393	.58045			
Disengagement	especially pleasant	2.1743	.50097	24.718	.000	203
	particularly uncomfortable	4.2857	.42056			
	sometimes uncomfortable	3.2353	.75075			
	usual atmosphere	2.6026	.62526			
Enmeshment	especially pleasant	2.3229	.52096	2.520	.059	203
	particularly uncomfortable	1.5714	.49487			
	sometimes uncomfortable	2.1429	.69803			
	usual atmosphere	2.2760	.55473			
Rigidity	especially pleasant	2.6000	.60540	6.297	.000	203
	particularly uncomfortable	2.1786	.37571			
	sometimes uncomfortable	1.9328	.56270			
	usual atmosphere	2.5661	.61455			
Chaos	especially pleasant	2.2000	.72499	11.893	.000	203
	particularly uncomfortable	3.4643	.29451			
	sometimes uncomfortable	3.1597	.73346			
	usual atmosphere	2.4307	.64081			
Balanced Communication	especially pleasant	4.3020	.68377	25.666	.000	203
	particularly uncomfortable	2.1000	.37417			
	sometimes uncomfortable	2.7765	.71897			
	usual atmosphere	3.8331	.76591			
Satisfaction with Family	especially pleasant	4.2640	.51696	21.329	.000	203
	particularly uncomfortable	2.8250	.99791			
	sometimes uncomfortable	3.0941	.60773			
	usual atmosphere	3.9195	.60119			

As expected, the association (measured by the F-test) is more than clear. There is a positive correlation between all the dimensions of functional patterns and the atmosphere during meals. The more functional the family relations, the more pleasant the atmosphere during the meal. And vice versa. There is a negative correlation between the subdimensions of dysfunctional patterns and the atmosphere during meals. The more enmeshment, rigidity and chaos are expressed in the relationships, the more unpleasant the atmosphere.

The correlations are more than clear. The atmosphere during meal is actually a reflection of family relationships that exist and that manifest during meals, but also establish and deepen (in the direction of functional or dysfunctional patterns).

Various studies around the world confirm this correlation. For example, limbic discharges that cause feelings of warmth and closeness among people may be recorded during participation in rituals (D'Aquili et al. 1979). Also, stronger family ritual meaning predicts a more positive family environment (i.e.: higher cohesion levels and lower conflict levels) and self-reported well-being in adolescents (Crespo, Kielpikowski, Pryor, and Jose 2011).

For the purpose of examining the relationship between patterns of functionality and the routines and rituals of family gatherings, we used the statistical procedure of factor analysis, and determined which factors were extracted from the scale of family routines and rituals applied in this research. Based on the factor analysis of the FGRRQ scale, there are 4 factors. The first factor is called "The Special Meaning of the Gathering" because this factor is most saturated with items that indicate the rituals of socializing, daily gatherings at lunchtime, and attaching a special meaning to these shared activities. The second factor is called "Specific Roles and Tasks" because this factor is most saturated with items that indicate the specific roles and tasks that family members perform within routines and rituals daily and over the weekend. The third factor is called "Daily Family Meals" because this factor is most saturated with items that indicate having breakfast, dinner together daily, and the claim that lunch is eaten at the same time every day. The fourth factor is called "Family Gathering During Visits" because this factor is most saturated with items that indicate the daily family gatherings during visits by relatives and friends.

**Table 7** The connection between family gathering routines and rituals and family adaptability

		Balanced Flexibility	Rigidity	Chaos
The Special Meaning of Gathering	Pearson Correlation	.441**	.335**	-.324**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	204	204	204
Specific Roles and Tasks	Pearson Correlation	.363**	.420**	-.276**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	204	204	204
Daily Family Meals	Pearson Correlation	.336**	.361**	-.230**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.001
	N	204	204	204
Family Gathering During Visits	Pearson Correlation	.230**	.302**	-.227**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	.001
	N	204	204	204

Based on Pearson's correlation coefficient, the analysis of the results shows that all the dimensions of gathering routines and rituals and the dimensions of adaptability are interrelated at a statistically significant level ( $\leq 0.00$ ).

With the prominence of the dimension of balanced flexibility, the prominence of all factors of gathering routines and rituals increases, particularly ascribing a special meaning to family gatherings. This factor stands out from the others in that it relates more to rituals and less to routines as is the case with other family gathering factors. For that reason, it is more correlated with balanced flexibility, as opposed to the following factor, which is more related to routines – specific roles and tasks, and is, therefore, more strongly associated with rigidity in family relationships.

There is a positive correlation between rigidity as a dysfunctional pattern of the dimension of flexibility and the factors of family gathering routines and rituals, while there is a negative one with chaos. Logically, where relationships are chaotic, where there is no order, we do not expect the existence of the routines and rituals of family gathering, while where there is rigidity in relationships, characterized by a clear division of roles and the presence of rules and no deviation from them – routines gain even more importance and actually describe the way these families function.

**Table 8** The connection between gathering routines and rituals and family cohesiveness

		Balanced Cohesiveness	Disengagement	Enmeshment
The Special Meaning of Gathering	Pearson Correlation	.638**	-.590**	.284**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	204	204	204
Specific Roles and Tasks	Pearson Correlation	.467**	-.355**	.186**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.008
	N	204	204	204
Daily Family Meals	Pearson Correlation	.442**	-.421**	.204**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.003
	N	204	204	204
Family Gathering During Visits	Pearson Correlation	.460**	-.443**	.243**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.638**	-.590**	.284**
	N	204	204	204

The results showed that when balanced cohesiveness is more pronounced, all the factors of gathering routines and rituals are more pronounced as well ( $r \leq 0.00$ ). The correlation is most prominent with the first factor - the special meaning of the gathering.

We can interpret this with the common determinants: togetherness and closeness. According to Fiese et al. (2002), rituals promote communication, positive interactions, support, and involvement (Kiser, Bennett, Heston and Paavola 2005). Furthermore, rituals strengthen family ties, so they contribute to a sense of union and belonging over time (Fiese 2007). In the end, many authors emphasize that rituals are powerful organizers of family life and a means of providing a sense of connection with others – which means cohesion (Cheal 1988; Santos et al. 2012; Wolin and Bennett 1984).

When dysfunctional patterns are concerned, disengagement is in a negative, and enmeshment in a positive correlation with the factors of family gathering routines and rituals. In disengagement, it is clear that there is no place for family routines and rituals. On the other hand, enmeshment in relationships characterizes the dependence of family members on other members, there is no private space, and there is a problem of separation. Thus, family gathering routines and rituals can be present in such relationships, but can also deepen these relationships if these families do not have parallel activities.

**Table 9** The connection between gathering routines and rituals and the satisfaction with the family

		Satisfaction with Family
The Special Meaning of Gathering	Pearson Correlation	.469**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	204
Specific Roles and Tasks	Pearson Correlation	.269**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	204
Daily Family Meals	Pearson Correlation	.342**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	204
Family Gathering During Visits	Pearson Correlation	.359**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	204

The results showed that when satisfaction with the family is more pronounced, family gathering routines and rituals are more present ( $r \leq 0.00$ ). The most pronounced correlation is with the factor - the special meaning of the gathering, which is logical, because where "lunch time is more than a meal and it has a special meaning", the satisfaction of family members with their family is actually evident. These results undoubtedly indicate the importance of these gathering routines and rituals, because when these routines and rituals occur on a daily basis, family satisfaction is established.

**Table 10** The relation between gathering routines and rituals and family communication

		Family Communication
The Special Meaning of Gathering	Pearson Correlation	.550**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	204
Specific Roles and Tasks	Pearson Correlation	.373**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	204
Daily Family Meals	Pearson Correlation	.422**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	204
Family Gathering During Visits	Pearson Correlation	.363**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	204

The results showed a statistically highly significant correlation between all factors of family gathering routines and rituals and family communication ( $r \leq 0.00$ ). A similar correlation was noted in other studies. According to Compañ, Moreno, Ruiz, and Pascual (2002: 94), family rituals may facilitate communication among family members, i.e., families coordinate schedules, make plans, and promote problem solving (also: Dickstein, 2002).

The most pronounced correlation is with the factor of the special meaning of the gathering, which can be interpreted by the fact that communication that is on a high level in a family contributes to the frequency of family gatherings and socializing. Then lunch has also the meaning of "more than a meal" because a family exchanges information and emotions at lunch through communication, whereby its importance is made clear.

## 5. LIMITATIONS

The main limitation of this study is geographical nature (caused by the use of a convenience sample), because this research was done in Niš, and the respondents are mostly from Southern and Eastern Serbia, so we cannot generalize without caution. It is therefore recommended that any other, more reliable sampling method be used in the future, thus contributing to the quality of the research. A second limitation is its cross-sectional nature, which did not allow us to analyze the direction of causality between the variables. Also, this study was based on self-reports, so the results must be interpreted with caution due to bias and giving socio-desirable answers. Further research could therefore use other instruments, techniques and methods, and with the generalization of the results of all these studies with a different methodology, we could draw more reliable and precise conclusions.

## CONCLUSION

Adolescence represents a very important, but a very critical period for a developing individual. Although independence of a child during adolescence is considered a crucial moment, it is very important to, in addition to the newly acquired individuality, preserve cohesiveness as a feature of a healthy family atmosphere. In observing a healthy atmosphere, we started from the assumption that family gathering routines and rituals play a significant role.

Research has shown that families with adolescents do not have a routine of frequent gatherings. Estimates of routines and rituals of family gatherings are higher when we talk about family gatherings for the purpose of preparing for and visiting relatives, and less when we talk about a set of established routines. This can be explained by an adequate pattern of functioning, and also by the stage of the life cycle when children become independent and enrich their lives with new routines and rituals outside the family. Family routines and rituals are statistically significantly associated with balanced patterns of family functioning. The results show that family gathering routines and rituals contribute to a sense of connection, because in families where they are not sufficiently present, the patterns of disengagement are more prominent, indicating a lack of togetherness, which is problematic for the educational function of family. The negative correlation between family gathering routines and rituals and chaotic patterns indicates that the existence of routines and rituals has a protective function because it provides a sense of security, which is also important in the context the educational function of the family.

The present study highlights the importance of acknowledging that family rituals can be a source of a more positive environment and outcomes for youth, and, accordingly, facilitate ways for allowing families to consistently carry out these ritual events, and so preserve their functionality. Therefore, it seems necessary to raise parents' awareness of the importance of routines and rituals and thus return the family to true values, preserving peace and family integrity in a world of incredibly rapid changes in all spheres of life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. On the other hand, we should not forget to respect the individuality of each member, and accordingly, strive for a balance between family routines and rituals and individual needs. The subject of some future research could be the relationship between family routines and rituals and individual needs and rituals. Also, future research could examine in more depth the causality between the variables examined in this research, which would contribute to elucidating this problem from several aspects.

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## PORODIČNO OKUPLJANJE I FUNKCIONALNOST PORODICA SA ADOLESCENTIMA

*Iako se smatra da je nezavisnost deteta tokom adolescencije od presudnog značaja, veoma je važno, pored novostečene individualnosti, sačuvati i kohezivnost kao odliku zdrave porodične atmosfere. Kohezivnost je takođe jedna od dve glavne dimenzije obrazaca porodičnog funkcionisanja. Istraživanjem porodične atmosfere, pošli smo od pretpostavke da rutine i rituali porodičnog okupljanja igraju značajnu ulogu. Ovo istraživanje vođeno je sistemskim pristupom u razumevanju značenja i značaja rutina i rituala okupljanja porodice. Cilj istraživanja bio je ispitivanje porodičnog okupljanja i funkcionalnosti savremene porodice sa adolescentom i utvrđivanje njihovog odnosa. Kao instrumenti korišćena je skala za procenu porodične kohezivnosti i fleksibilnosti, FACES IV (Olson, Gorall and Tiesel, 2006), kao i Upitnik rutina i rituala porodičnog okupljanja, FGRRQ, koji je posebno osmišljen za potrebe ovog istraživanja. Istraživanje je obuhvatilo 204 ispitanika - srednjoškolaca i studenata. Rezultati su pokazali da porodice sa adolescentima u Srbiji karakterišu uravnoteženi obrasci porodičnog funkcionisanja, ali okupljanje nije u velikoj meri prisutno. Porodično okupljanje statistički je značajno povezano sa uravnoteženim obrascima funkcionisanja porodice. Takođe je pronađena nešto slabija povezanost sa obrascima porodične rigidnosti i isprepletanosti. Negativna povezanost između porodičnog okupljanja i obrazaca razjedinjenosti i haosa ukazuje na značajnost okupljanja za porodičnu funkcionalnost. Korelacije pokazuju da porodično okupljanje doprinosi osećaju povezanosti, jer u porodicama u kojima okupljanje nije dovoljno prisutno, prisutniji je obrazac razjedinjenosti, što ukazuje na nedostatak zajedništva, a što je problematično za vaspitnu funkciju porodice.*

*Ključne reči: adolescenti, okupljanje, porodično funkcionisanje, rituali, rutine.*