

# FAMILY FUNCTIONALITY AND ITS EFFECTS ON ENVIRONMENTAL MASTERY AND POSITIVE RELATIONS AMONG MALAYSIAN SECONDARY STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** *This study examined the influence of family functionality on psychological well-being dimensions among Malaysian secondary school students. Specifically, it investigated how family functionality affects environmental mastery and positive relations with others. Using a cross-sectional research design, data were collected from 180 students across three secondary schools in Perak, Malaysia through structured questionnaires based on Olsen and Gorell's family functionality framework and Ryff's psychological well-being scales. Structural equation modelling revealed that family functionality significantly predicted both environmental mastery ( $\beta = 0.344$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and positive relations with others ( $\beta = 0.335$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), explaining approximately 12% and 11% of their variance respectively. These findings highlight the critical role of functional family environments in developing adolescents' psychological resources for managing their surroundings and building healthy relationships. Educational stakeholders should consider family-centered interventions to enhance adolescent psychological development, particularly in predominantly Malay communities where family structures significantly influence youth development.*

**Keywords:** *Family Functional; Psychological well-being; Malaysian adolescents; Secondary education; Cross-sectional study; PLS-SEM*

## Introduction

Adolescence represents a critical developmental period characterized by significant psychological, social, and biological transitions that shape individuals' future well-being and functioning (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). During this formative stage, adolescents develop crucial psychological resources that influence their capacity to navigate life challenges, establish meaningful relationships, and maintain positive mental health (Lerner et al., 2018). Among the various environmental factors influencing adolescent development, family functionality emerges as particularly significant, serving as the primary context for socialization, identity formation, and emotional regulation (Fosco et al., 2016). Family environments characterized by effective communication, emotional support, and adaptive problem-solving typically foster positive developmental outcomes, while dysfunctional family patterns may contribute to psychological difficulties and maladaptive behaviors (Olson, 2011). The significant influence of family dynamics on adolescent psychological well-being has been well-documented across diverse cultural contexts, though important cultural variations exist in how family functionality manifests and impacts development (Kagitcibasi, 2017). Within Malaysia's collectivistic cultural framework, family relationships hold particular significance, often characterized by strong intergenerational bonds, hierarchical structures, and pronounced emphasis on family harmony and cohesion (Noor & Mahudin, 2016). Malaysia's multiethnic composition—predominantly Malay, Chinese, and Indian—further enriches the complexity of family influence patterns, with each cultural tradition bringing distinct family values and practices that shape adolescent development (Keshavarz & Baharudin, 2009). The Malaysian educational system, structured to emphasize academic achievement while promoting moral development through religious and civic education, creates a unique context for examining how family functionality interfaces with school experiences to influence adolescent psychological outcomes (Molina Moreno et al., 2024).

Despite extensive research on family influence in adolescent development, significant gaps persist in understanding the specific mechanisms through which family functionality affects distinct dimensions of psychological well-being, particularly in non-Western contexts (Shek et al., 2019). Much existing research has examined psychological well-being as a unidimensional construct, potentially obscuring the differential impact of family functionality on specific psychological resources (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Environmental mastery—the capacity to effectively manage one's life circumstances and create contexts suitable for personal needs—represents a crucial developmental task during adolescence that has received insufficient attention in relation to family influences (Ryff, 2014). Similarly, positive relations with others—the ability to form warm, trusting interpersonal connections—constitutes a fundamental aspect of psychological well-being that may be particularly sensitive to family relationship patterns (Segrin & Flora, 2011). The transitional nature of adolescence makes these competencies especially relevant, as adolescents increasingly navigate environments beyond the family and establish independent relationship networks (Laursen & Collins, 2009). These psychological dimensions hold particular relevance within Malaysia's educational context, where academic pressures, cultural expectations, and rapid societal changes create complex demands for adolescents' adaptive capacities (Kok & Low, 2017). Malaysian secondary school students face unique challenges, including high-stakes examinations, multicultural classroom environments, and navigating between traditional values and globalized influences, making

psychological resources for environmental management and relationship formation especially valuable (Salleh & Zainal, 2014). Additionally, Malaysia's ongoing societal transformation from traditional to more modernized family structures creates potential tensions between familial expectations and adolescents' developing autonomy, potentially impacting both environmental mastery and relationship formation (Abdul Kadir et al., 2012).

This study addresses these research gaps by examining how family functionality specifically influences environmental mastery and positive relations among Malaysian secondary school students. By focusing on these distinct dimensions rather than general well-being, this investigation provides more nuanced understanding of family influence pathways in adolescent development (Umberson & Thomeer, 2020). The study builds upon Olson's Circumplex Model of family functioning, which conceptualizes family dynamics through dimensions of cohesion, flexibility, and communication (Olson, 2000), and Ryff's multidimensional model of psychological well-being, which distinguishes between environmental mastery and positive relations as distinct aspects of optimal functioning (Ryff, 1989). This theoretical integration allows for examining specific mechanisms through which family patterns influence adolescents' capacities to manage their environments and form positive relationships (Pinquart & Kauser, 2018). Understanding these relationships holds significant implications for educational and family intervention programs in Malaysia, potentially informing strategies to enhance adolescent psychological resources through family-focused approaches (Baharudin et al., 2011). The findings may also contribute to theoretical understandings of cultural variations in family influence patterns, expanding knowledge beyond predominantly Western research contexts (Masten & Barnes, 2018). Given Malaysia's aspirations for educational excellence and youth development as articulated in national development plans, research clarifying family contributions to adolescent psychological resources aligns with broader policy objectives for enhancing youth potential and well-being (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013).

## Literature Review

Family functionality is significantly influenced by attachment patterns, which serve as the foundation for interpersonal relationships throughout life. Secure attachment within the family system is associated with higher levels of family cohesion, adaptability, and overall satisfaction (Baiocco et al., 2017; Jie et al., 2024). Research indicates that family cohesion—reflecting the strength of family bonds—positively correlates with both affective and cognitive components of children's and adolescents' happiness (Izzo et al., 2022). According to Bowlby's attachment theory, early parent-child interactions create internal working models that guide expectations in relationships, with secure attachment promoting effective communication and emotional regulation within families (Fonseca et al., 2012; Assalone et al., 2024). Studies have demonstrated that parents with secure attachment orientations typically demonstrate more responsive parenting, fostering healthier family functioning (Lamb et al., 2016). Conversely, insecure attachment patterns are associated with communication difficulties, higher conflict, and reduced family satisfaction (Shek, 1997; Magliano et al., 2014). Workplace stressors, including bullying, can significantly impact family relationships, with negative experiences at work potentially harming employees' family functioning through spillover effects (Jie et al., 2024). The relationship appears bidirectional, as indicated by longitudinal studies showing that adolescents' perceived family functioning at one time point relates to psychological well-being at later points (Shek, 2005). In challenging contexts, such as families with children with rare diseases, attachment security serves as a protective factor that facilitates adaptation and resilience (Ortega et al., 2022; Vitale, 2016). Family adaptability—the quality of leadership, organization, and role relationships—correlates with attachment security and predicts better

family outcomes during times of stress (Verrastro et al., 2020). Research consistently demonstrates that intervention programs targeting attachment security can improve family functioning across various domains, including communication, problem-solving, and emotional support (Tramonti et al., 2019; Boettcher et al., 2021).

Research on psychological well-being has increasingly recognized the foundational role of attachment patterns in shaping an individual's capacity for positive psychological functioning across multiple dimensions. Attachment theory, originally formulated by Bowlby and expanded by Ainsworth, provides a framework for understanding how early relationship experiences create internal working models that guide emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships, and overall psychological adjustment throughout life (Kumari & Thapa, 2025). Secure attachment, characterized by consistent and responsive caregiving, has been associated with higher scores across Ryff's six dimensions of psychological well-being: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (van Dierendonck & Lam, 2023). Individuals with secure attachment demonstrate greater self-acceptance through positive self-regard and realistic self-evaluation (Sarzhanova & Nurgabdeshev, 2025). The dimension of positive relations with others is particularly influenced by attachment history, with securely attached individuals exhibiting more satisfying, trusting relationships characterized by emotional intimacy and reciprocity (Izzo et al., 2022). Research indicates that secure attachment facilitates greater autonomy and environmental mastery by fostering confidence in one's ability to function independently while effectively managing external demands (Assalone et al., 2024). Conversely, insecure attachment patterns (anxious and avoidant) have been linked to deficits across well-being dimensions, with anxious attachment associated with reduced autonomy and environmental mastery, while avoidant attachment correlates with diminished positive relations and purpose in life (Kumari & Thapa, 2025). Family functioning studies consistently demonstrate that cohesive, adaptable, and communicative family environments promote secure attachment and subsequent psychological well-being, while family conflict and dysfunction predict insecure attachment and reduced well-being (Jie et al., 2024). Intervention research suggests that psychological well-being can be enhanced through programs targeting attachment security, with improvements in positive relations, environmental mastery, and self-acceptance showing the strongest effects (van Dierendonck & Lam, 2023).

Recent studies have consistently demonstrated significant relationships between family functioning and psychological well-being across diverse populations. Ahmad et al. (2021) examined this relationship during COVID-19 lockdown in Pakistan with 224 participants (97 males, 127 females) and found that family functioning dimensions, particularly intimacy and parenting style, positively correlated with psychological well-being. Their results revealed that active coping mediated this relationship, with healthy family functioning providing resources to cope effectively in stressful situations. Similarly, Molina Moreno et al. (2024) investigated 1,092 Spanish high school students (584 females, 508 males) aged 12-17 years and observed positive correlations between family functioning, psychological well-being, and emotional intelligence. Their findings demonstrated that students with high family functionality showed significantly higher scores on psychological well-being measures compared to those with moderate functionality or severe dysfunctionality. Archana and Sinha (2024) studied 265 young adults (aged 18-26) in southern India and found that family cohesion positively correlated with all dimensions of psychological well-being, while family relationship problems showed significant negative correlations. Their research highlighted that family conflicts and tensions detrimentally impacted autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive

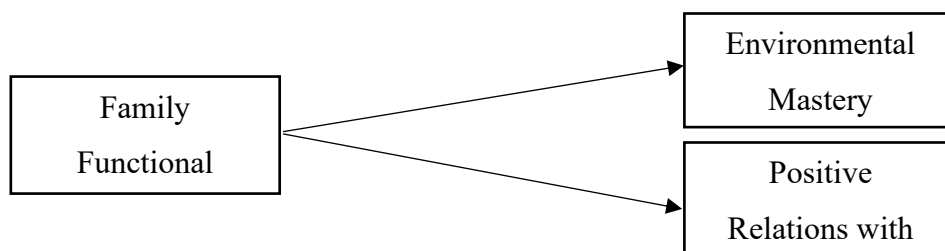


relationships, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Adding to this body of research, Nezelek et al. (2025) examined 447 Polish university students and found that environmental mastery, a component of psychological well-being often influenced by family dynamics, mediated relationships between incremental beliefs and well-being. Collectively, these studies underscore the consistent cross-cultural importance of family functioning for psychological well-being across different age groups and cultural contexts. They suggest that healthy family relationships characterized by cohesion, adaptability, and positive communication foster better psychological outcomes, while family relationship problems and dysfunction contribute to diminished well-being. The discussion leads to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Family functional has a positive and insignificant relationship with environmental mastery.

Hypothesis 2: Family functional has a positive and insignificant relationship with positive relations with others.

The literature has guided the investigators to frame the conceptual framework for this investigation, as depicted in figure 1.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

## Methodology

This investigation utilized a cross-sectional research design to examine relationships between family functionality and psychological constructs among Malaysian secondary school students. The methodological framework combined literature review with quantitative data collection through structured questionnaires, chosen for its efficiency in addressing methodological constraints and minimizing systematic bias (Cresswell, 1998; Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). The measurement instrument comprised two sections: one assessing family functioning through 5 items adapted from Olsen and Gorell's (2003) conceptual framework, and another evaluating psychological well-being dimensions (environmental mastery: 3 items, positive relations with others – 3 items) using 6 items based on Ryff's (1989) established scales, both employing 5-point Likert measurements ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Demographic variables including gender, ethnicity, age, and parental characteristics were also gathered. The sampling strategy employed purposive techniques to recruit 200 adolescents across three secondary schools in Perak, Malaysia, enabling direct researcher interaction during data collection and yielding 180 completed questionnaires (90% response rate). Data analysis employed SmartPLS software for its advantages in handling latent constructs, accommodating moderate sample sizes, processing non-normal distributions, and evaluating complex structural relationships (Hair et al., 2016; Henseler et al., 2009). The analytical protocol followed systematic procedures: confirmatory factor analysis for measurement validation, hypothesis testing using two-tailed t-statistics (significance threshold: 1.96), predictive relevance assessment via  $Q^2$  values, and model fit evaluation using standardized root mean square residual indices (acceptable threshold: <0.1).

## Results

### Characteristics of the respondent

This study examined a sample of 180 Malaysian secondary school students characterized by a slight female majority (57.8%) and predominantly Malay ethnicity (98.9%). The age distribution centered primarily on 16-year-olds (50.6%), with additional representation from 14-year-olds (22.2%), 15-year-olds (16.7%), and 13-year-olds (10.0%). Regarding socioeconomic indicators, parental employment was distributed across self-employment (50.6%), government sectors (40.0%), and private sectors (8.9%), while household income revealed a substantial proportion of participants from lower-income brackets (45.0% earning RM0-1000 monthly), with the remainder distributed across middle-income (29.4% earning RM1001-2000) and higher-income categories (18.3% earning above RM2000). This demographic profile provides essential context for interpreting the relationship between family functional and psychological well-being among Malaysian secondary school students, offering insights into a population that predominantly represents Malay adolescents from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds within the Malaysian educational system.

### Measurement model Analysis

Based on Table 1 the analysis of measurement properties reveals all three constructs demonstrate satisfactory psychometric characteristics. Family Functional exhibits strong reliability with both Cronbach's alpha (0.818) and composite reliability (0.873) exceeding recommended thresholds, alongside adequate convergent validity (AVE = 0.579). Environmental Mastery displays acceptable internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.701$ ) with robust composite reliability ( $\rho_c = 0.829$ ) and variance extraction (AVE = 0.619) significantly above the 0.50 benchmark. Similarly, Positive Relations with Others shows adequate reliability coefficients ( $\alpha = 0.700$ ,  $\rho_c = 0.819$ ) with satisfactory convergent validity (AVE = 0.602), indicating the construct explains approximately 60% of its indicators' variance. These measurements confirm all three constructs possess sufficient internal consistency and convergent validity for further structural modeling. The comprehensive assessment of reliability and validity metrics establishes a methodologically sound foundation for examining the interrelationships between family functionality, environmental mastery, and positive interpersonal relations among Malaysian secondary school students, providing confidence in subsequent analyses exploring how these constructs interact within the study population.

**Table 1: The Outcomes of Convergent Validity Analysis and Composite Reliability**

| Constructs                     | Cronbach's<br>alpha | Composite<br>reliability ( $\rho_c$ ) | Average Variance<br>Extracted (AVE) |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Family Functional              | 0.818               | 0.873                                 | 0.579                               |
| Environmental Mastery          | 0.701               | 0.829                                 | 0.619                               |
| Positive Relations with Others | 0.700               | 0.819                                 | 0.602                               |

### Structural Equation Modelling

The structural model results presented in Table 2 reveal that Family Functional serves as a predictor variable influencing both Environmental Mastery and Positive Relations with Others. The analysis indicates Family Functional explains 11.9% of variance in Environmental Mastery ( $R^2=0.119$ ), with an adjusted  $R^2$  value of 0.116 suggesting appropriate model specification relative to sample size and predictor count. Similarly, Family Functional accounts for 11.3% of variance in Positive Relations with Others ( $R^2=0.113$ , adjusted  $R^2=0.110$ ). The  $Q^2$  predict values for both Environmental Mastery (0.068) and Positive Relations with Others (0.061)

exceed zero, confirming the model possesses predictive relevance despite moderate effect sizes. These findings demonstrate that family functionality contributes meaningfully to both environmental mastery capabilities and positive interpersonal relationships among Malaysian secondary school students, although the modest magnitude of these effects suggests family functionality represents just one of several factors influencing these psychological constructs within the cultural context of Malaysian adolescents.

**Table 2: Coefficient of Determination for the PLS-SEM**

| Relationship among constructs  | R-square | R-square adjusted | Q <sup>2</sup> predict |
|--------------------------------|----------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Environmental Mastery          | 0.119    | 0.116             | 0.068                  |
| Positive Relations with Others | 0.113    | 0.110             | 0.061                  |

The structural equation modeling results presented in Table 3 provide robust statistical evidence supporting both research hypotheses. Family Functionality demonstrates a significant positive influence on Environmental Mastery (H1:  $\beta = 0.344$ ,  $t = 6.911$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) with a comparable effect on Positive Relations with Others (H2:  $\beta = 0.335$ ,  $t = 6.617$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The modest effect sizes ( $f^2 = 0.134$  and  $f^2 = 0.127$ , respectively) indicate Family Functionality contributes meaningfully to both psychological constructs. The bootstrap confidence intervals further establish precision in these parameter estimates, with narrow bounds for Environmental Mastery (LLCI = 0.269, ULCI = 0.432) and Positive Relations with Others (LLCI = 0.260, ULCI = 0.426), all remaining consistently positive. These findings conclusively support both hypotheses, confirming that family functionality significantly enhances adolescents' capacity for environmental mastery and their ability to develop positive interpersonal relationships. The identified relationships demonstrate not only statistical significance but practical relevance within Malaysian secondary educational contexts, suggesting that students from more functional family environments tend to develop stronger psychological resources for managing their surroundings and building healthy relationships with others.

**Table 3: Structured Equations Model Results**

| Hypotheses | Relationship among constructs | $\beta$ | Sample mean (M) | S. D  | t-values | f-square | p-values | LLCI 5.0% | ULCI 95.0% | Remarks  |
|------------|-------------------------------|---------|-----------------|-------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|------------|----------|
| H1         | FF → EM                       | 0.344   | 0.351           | 0.050 | 6.911    | 0.134    | 0.000    | 0.269     | 0.432      | Accepted |
| H2         | FF → PRWO                     | 0.335   | 0.344           | 0.051 | 6.617    | 0.127    | 0.000    | 0.260     | 0.426      | Accepted |

## Discussion

The findings demonstrate that family functionality significantly influences psychological well-being dimensions among Malaysian secondary school students, specifically environmental mastery ( $\beta = 0.344$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and positive relations with others ( $\beta = 0.335$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). These relationships are particularly meaningful within Malaysia's collectivistic cultural context, where family harmony and interdependence are highly valued. The study extends attachment theory by showing how family attachment processes manifest in specific psychological competencies during adolescence, with functional families likely providing modeling opportunities for environmental management and relationship skills while fostering emotional regulation capacities essential for both dimensions. The predominantly Malay sample from varied socioeconomic backgrounds highlights family functionality's importance across economic circumstances, though the moderate explained variance (11.9% and 11.3%) indicates other factors influence these outcomes as well.

### **Practical Implications**

These results emphasize the value of family-focused interventions within Malaysian educational settings. School counselors should consider family assessment when supporting adolescents with environmental mastery or relationship difficulties. Parent education programs focusing on communication, emotional responsiveness, and adaptive problem-solving could enhance family functionality and, consequently, adolescent psychological resources. Educational policies should incorporate family engagement strategies into student support frameworks, while targeted interventions for adolescents from less functional families might address attachment insecurities to enhance resilience.

### **Research Limitations and Future Directions**

The cross-sectional design limits causal inferences, while self-report measures may introduce social desirability bias. The sample's ethnic homogeneity (98.9% Malay) constrains generalizability across Malaysia's multicultural population. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to clarify causal relationships, include more diverse ethnic samples, incorporate mixed methods approaches for richer insights, expand outcome measures beyond the two dimensions studied, and examine potential moderators like gender, socioeconomic status, and school climate.

### **Conclusion**

This study provides compelling evidence that family functionality serves as a crucial foundation for Malaysian adolescents' psychological development, significantly enhancing their capacity for environmental mastery and positive relationship formation as they navigate educational demands and societal transitions. The findings, contextualized within Malaysia's collectivistic culture, demonstrate how functional family environments characterized by balanced cohesion and adaptability provide adolescents with essential psychological resources—including models for effective environmental management, emotional regulation capacities, and secure bases for exploring relationships beyond the family unit. These results underscore the importance of family-centered approaches in educational and psychological support services, suggesting that strengthening family functionality represents a valuable pathway for promoting adolescent well-being and successful adaptation to adulthood within Malaysia's evolving social landscape, while also extending theoretical frameworks by illuminating specific mechanisms through which family systems influence distinct dimensions of psychological functioning during this critical developmental period.

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