

Academic Achievements of Adolescents and Family Functioning

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Abstract

This study is focused on academic achievement of adolescents and their relationship with family functioning. The study aims to reveal through several research methods the functioning of family ties (cohesion and flexibility) and the type of adolescents' families, their academic achievements, as well as the demographic characteristics of families based on their categorization by type of functioning. To realize the goals of the study were conducted measurements of family functioning in order to determine the type of functioning and through semi-structured interviews and conversations were revealed characteristics of families by type of functioning. The study sample consists of adolescents (N= 32) and their parents (N=27). It was found that the gender of the adolescent, being a resident for the last 15 years in the capital versus new arrivals, education of parents, the density of the apartment and the economic situation have positive correlation with family functioning, which in turn is positively related to family support in the aid in learning and academic achievement of adolescents. The study also found that low levels of family cohesion and family functioning are related mostly with newcomer families in the capital these last 15 years. The study found that these families have much more difficulties and challenges to face compared to resident families. The author makes recommendations for further studies on families during the migration processes.

Keywords: family functioning, family cohesion, family flexibility, demographic characteristics, academic achievement

1. Introduction

Albania is a country that has invested and strived for years to achieve the objectives in all areas of country development in order to join Europe. Achievements in the field of education are among the most challenging objectives to be realized considering that the country has inherited from the communist past many gaps in terms of educational infrastructure and human resources. Educational achievements of students constitute a way to measure the achievements of the objectives in the field of education as they are key indicators of the performance of an educational system. On the other hand, adolescents' academic achievements are vital for the future of young people because any decision taken by them and their families for further education is based precisely on these results (Kashahu, 2016). In addition, according to Hanushek and Woessmann (2012), they have a special importance because based on scientific certificates, they affect the country's economic future. According to Masten & Obradovic (2006) progress in school is the main task for the adolescent. Consequently, adolescence is a period where young people need support, especially from their family, which constitutes the most important microenvironment for the adolescent (Bronfenbrenner, 1976).

In key strategic and political documents, the academic achievement of Albanian students is viewed with concern. "Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA 2000), showed that the results are relatively weak" (SKAP, 2009, p. 10). Similarly, the World Bank report for Albania (2011, p. 11) stated that in the Standardized Test of Pisa 2009,

Albania had the lowest assessment in Europe in math and reading achievements, being ranked last. The statistical office, near REDT¹, reports data which show that the results of learning in core subjects such as mathematics and language indicate decrease rather than improvements. Specifically, during the academic year, 2013-2014 the achievements of students in grade 9 of 9 grade schools of Tirana in the subject of native language were as follows: the annual average grade 7.6 and the average grade in the leaving examination 8. It turns out that in this subject 38% of students had low annual achievements. In the academic year 2014-2015, the annual average grade in native language was 7.5 and in the leaving exam 7.8. However, there is also a growing number of students that failed to pass the exam of this subject from 1.1 to 2.3.

Regarding academic achievements in mathematics during the school year 2013-2014, the annual average grade in mathematics is 6.8 and at the leaving exam is 6.76. The students who had low annual achievements in this subject constitute 55.7% of the total number of students. A year later, the annual average grade in mathematics was 6.8 and at the leaving exam 7.3, marking a slight increase in the average grade of leaving exam, but on the other hand an increase in the number of students who failed to pass the exam in mathematics from 1.2 to 2.3. The above mentioned facts prove the concrete need of the country for proper scientific studies to better understand the factors that affect academic achievements of Albanian students.

In fact, the academic achievement of adolescents have attracted the attention of researchers in the field of education throughout the world, turning them into the principal object of their studies (Allen, 2007; Blankstein, 2010; Huston, & Bentley, 2010; Catsambis, 2002; Conger & Donnellan, 2007; Epstein et al., 2011; Fan & Chen, 2001; Hill & Chao, 2009; Hong & Ho, 2005; Jaynes, 2005; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Patrikakou, 2004; Sanders, 2006; Seginer, 2006; Spera, Although it is understood and appreciated the importance of family and its contribution at the achievement of children, there are rare studies that deepen understanding on family functioning dynamics and linking it with children's performance (Kashahu, 2015), while there is not a lack of the studies which measure the level of family involvement in education and the impact of parental activity in their children's school achievement (Huston, & Bentley 2010; Davis-Kean, 2005; Eppler & Weir, 2009; Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005).

The relationship between SES and academic growth is the most studied one. SES of adolescents family was found to be the most important factor in predicting their academic achievements by the OECD report (2011). In this report, Albania is classified in the list of countries economically disadvantaged and therefore the academic achievements are considered at risk for Albanian students (Kashahu, 2013). However, research on indicators that influence academic achievements is not limited to one of the SES factors such as economic incomes, even though they are very important, but they expand the view with studies of family environment factors, like environment where interactions occur between the child and parent (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) that according to the researchers Lacour & Tissington, (2011) affect academic achievement in particular during adolescence. Parental education is another indicator connected with the students achievements and especially their mothers education (Huston & Bentley, 2010; Kashahu, 2013). Davis-Kean (2005) explain that highly educated parents establish realistic but high expectations for their children and are more involved in the activities of learning at home. Researchers Conger & Donnellan (2007) support the argument of Huston & Bentley (2010), adding that the level of parents education affects the growth of their social status, and both serve to increase the intellectual and human resources to deepen more in knowledge and to gain skills and habits that help learning.

Whereas in 2005, the researcher Gutman, McLoyd & Tokoyawa brought up new findings related to family factors and academic achievements, such as unemployment and high density of apartment, which according to the authors is negatively associated with high educational achievements. Five years later the researcher Marteleto (2010), reaffirms the negative relationship between school achievement and high density of apartment and family members as well. These findings of Marteleto are supported by other studies that confirm that life in an overcrowded house (more than one person per room) creates stress and difficulties in children's performance (Antoniou et al., 2013; Evans, Ricciuti, Hope, Schoo, Bradley, Corwyn et al., 2010; Kashahu, 2013). In crowded environments conditions are unlikely to help students do their homework due to lack of space and tranquility (Kashahu, 2013). On the other hand, in these conditions it is very hard to be accomplished the monitoring of children by parents and the building of good learning habits (Brown & Low, 2008).

According to Amato & Fowler (2002), warm emotional relationship between parent and adolescent is a significant

¹ Regional Education Directorate of Tirana is one of the most important departments in Albania because the city of Tirana has the highest density of population in the country. According to INSTAT (2013) about one third of the population of Albania resides in Tirana region.

predictor of their academic achievements, as the young benefits in many forms of family interaction (Crosnoe & Elder, 2004). Talking about family interaction are clearly taken into account the dimensions of interaction that are related to family functioning (the family cohesion, flexibility and communication between family members). If we refer to emotional ties between parents and adolescents, the positive perception of young people on the family cohesion creates in their eyes a supportive family, that is near them emotionally in every situation. When adolescents perceive their families as functional and they do have personal freedom in decision-making, the academic performance increases (Crosnoe & Elder, 2004; Bernard, 1991).

2. Theoretical Framework

During the last three decades, different models of researchers have been focused on the development dynamics of family functioning, making efforts to connect research, theory and practice, (Olson, Russell, and Sprenkle, 1989). *Circumplex Model* of family, created by these researchers, established the possibility to further develop theoretical framework of family development through research studies. This theoretical framework assesses how the family works through three dimensions of family life: cohesion, flexibility (adaptability) and communication (Olson and Gorall, 2003). This study is based on the theoretical framework of *Circumplex Model*.

Within the Circumplex Model, some of the specific concepts or variables that can be used to diagnose and measure the family cohesion dimensions are: emotional bonding, boundaries, coalitions, time, space, friends, decision-making and interests and recreation (Olson, Russell, and Sprenkle, 2014:9). Assessment of the above factors helps in determining the level of family cohesion. Families with low cohesion are characterized by the concept of "*emotional breakdown*" while families with high cohesion have as a basic quality "*solid relationship*" or families with "*high consensus*". (Olson, 1993) There are four levels of cohesion ranging from *disengaged* (very low) to *separated* (low to moderate) to *connected* (moderate to high) to *enmeshed* (very high) It is hypothesized that the central or balanced levels of cohesion (separated and connected) make for optimal family functioning. The extremes or unbalanced levels (disengaged or enmeshed) are generally seen as problematic for relationships over the long term. In the model's balanced area of cohesion (separated and connected), individuals are able to experience and balance these two extremes and are also able to be both independent from and connected to their families. (Olson, Russell, and Sprenkle, 2014:9).

Adaptability (flexibility) is the ability to adapt, the ability to change that the family system has on the functioning of family roles, relationships, rules established for maintaining the relationship in response to stress (Olson, 1993). The four levels of flexibility range from *rigid* (very low) to *structured* (low to moderate) to *flexible* (moderate to high) to *chaotic* (very high) As with cohesion, it is hypothesized that central or balanced levels of flexibility (structured and flexible) are more conducive to good marital and family functioning, with the extremes (rigid and chaotic) being the most problematic for families as they move through the their life cycle. (Olson, Russell, and Sprenkle, 2014:12). It was concluded that excessive flexibility leads to a chaotic family, while low flexibility leads to a very rigid relationship. (Olson,1993). Healthy family functioning is exhibited not only in terms of physical and emotional proximity, but also in terms of flexibility as a members' competence to adjust their relationships through patterns of communication, and to understand decision-making processes, relationship rules and role expectations (Olson, 2000).

As a starting point for this research were the results of a doctoral study not yet published (Kashahu, 2013) whose measurements were carried out three years ago, where it turns out that the functioning of metropolitan families is mainly extreme and the level of cohesion is too low, being a determining factor of the extreme functioning. There are few scientific research studies focused on the relationship between family functioning and academic achievements, (Antoniou, Dalla, Kashahu, Karaj, Michailidis dhe Georgiadi, 2013; Kashahu, 2012, 2013; Kashahu dhe Karaj, 2012), but even more rare are studies on the effects that demographic characteristics have on the dimensions of family functioning (Antoniou, Dalla, Kashahu, Karaj, Michailidis dhe Georgiadi, 2013). The study aims: a) to identify the level of family functioning (cohesion and flexibility) and family type for each adolescent; b) to examine the family's functioning (cohesion and flexibility) and type of adolescents family, their academic achievements, as well as c) to determine the demographic characteristics of families based on the categorization of families according to the type of functioning.

3. Methodology

To meet the goals of this study were used combined methods with the aim of having comprehensive findings. Measurements were conducted specifically about family functioning and qualitative methods were used to collect data

through semi-structured individual interviews and free conversations with adolescents and parents.

3.1 The participants

Participants in this study were adolescents (N=32) and their parents (N=27). The sample was selected with the technique of stratified random sampling (Matthewes & Ross, 2010, p 166-68). Adolescents sample consisted of 14 girls and 18 boys aged 14-15 years. The girls group was composed of three girls with families that had been residents of the city of Tirana for a long time and 11 girls whose families had arrived in Tirana in the last 15 years. While the group of boys consisted of four adolescent, residents in Tirana for many years and 14 boys whose families had arrived in Tirana in the past 15 years. Mainly, the adolescents coming in recent years were from the villages and towns of Kukës Dibra, Elbasan, Berat, Korca, Gjirokastra and Fier regions.

Also in this study participated 27 parents, even though initially it was scheduled to interview 32 parents, a parent for each adolescent interviewed. Parents belonged to the age group 37 to 62 years out of which 12 were males and 15 females. Regarding gender, were interviewed 12 males and 15 females. From the group of fathers that were interviewed only two were residents in Tirana and 10 of them belonged to the group of newcomers from towns and villages of Kukës, Dibra, Elbasan, Berat, Korca, Gjirokastra and Fier. With regard to the group of mothers, 3 of them were residents in Tirana and 12 belonged to the group of newcomers. Concerning the employment of parents interviewed, 3 in 4 fathers resulted employed, whereas nearly half of the mothers were unemployed or working with seasonal work.

3.2 Measurements

To measure the level of family cohesion and flexibility and to determine the family type was used a self-report inventory (Olson, Portner, Bell, & Filsinger, 1982) which was administered to 32 adolescents. This inventory was previously used in a doctoral study with a sample of 714 adolescents, where factorial analysis were in compliance with the original scale and reliability of the instrument for both subscales was high. This inventory consists of 30 item in Likert scale, where 1 means that what is described there never happens in the family, while 5 means that what is described occurs more often. There are 16 items measuring the cohesion and 14 items measuring the flexibility. Along with the functioning of the family inventory was completed an inventory of SES of adolescent family were it was taken into the consideration: the origin of the family (resident, or newcomer in Tirana), education of both parents, employment, kind of job, family structure, density of apartment and family income level. Also, records were taken by the class registers about the grades of mother tongue and mathematics, and the average grade of the main subjects of every adolescent which subsequently were confirmed by them.

The semi-structured interviews with adolescents and their parents aimed to discover the experience of metropolitan family dynamics associated with its functioning, which helps to understand what kind of demographic features have the families that are not cohesive versus those that show balanced levels of family cohesion or families with balanced functioning versus those with extreme functioning. Their structures were based on the theory indicators of Circumplex Model (Olson, Russell, and Sprenkle, 2014:9-25). More specifically, the interviews structure was oriented in terms of cohesion by indicators such as a) *emotional connection* (How do you support each other and how close to each other do you feel in your family? Does your child ask for your help in learning and how do you support him/her? Do you need help for the lessons? How do your parents support you), b) *family boundaries and the decision making* (Who do discuss your problems with? Do you consider the family opinion when you take your decisions?) and c) *time, space, friends, interests and recreation* (How do you organize your free time and with whom do you spend it?).

Indicators of flexibility dimension were: a) security, (Do you feel free to express your opinion in your family?); b) leadership, (Are children's opinions taken into consideration when making decisions in the family?); c) roles (How do you share the family tasks?); and d) rules (How you set rules in your family? Are they clear and is it possible to change them any time?)

3.3 Procedures of data collection and data processing

Data for this study were collected during April-June 2014. Six schools were randomly selected (two schools from down town area, two from the first urban ring of the city and two from the city suburbs) and from each school were selected 3-4 ninth grade students, who were asked to fill the family functioning inventory and the one of the SES. Then, were realized interviews with students and their parents. The Inventory of family functioning was processed manually, based on manual

processing (Olson, 1992). For the convenience of analysis of passing grades data (there was no failing grades in this sample) were grouped into three levels namely, low level 5-6, the average level of 7-8 and the high level 9-10. Once it was determined the level of cohesion, flexibility and family functioning, were analyzed their relations with indicators of SES, and academic achievement of adolescents. Semi-structured interviews were analyzed thematically by using the technique of labeling and coding which enabled the interpretation of these data.

4. Results

4.1 General demographic and social data of adolescents

From the analysis of data results that one in four adolescents belong to families resident in Tirana, while three-quarters of them come from families that have arrived in the capital over the past 15 years from districts of Kukës, Dibra, Elbasan, Berat, Korca, Gjirokastra and Fier. Most of the children come from families with both parents. The density of the sample's apartment turns out to be high. It was reported by adolescents that about 1 in 5 students has his room. Table 1 contains comprehensive data separated by the students' gender.

Table 1. Absolute frequencies of family origin, structure and density of the apartment on the basis of gender

Gender	Family origin		Family structure		Apartment density	
	Residents	Coming last 15 years	Families with both parents	Families with one parent	Low ²	High ³
1. Females	3	11	14	0	3	11
2. Males	4	14	18	1	3	15
Total	7	25	31	1	6	26

The educational level of the adolescent's mothers and fathers interviewed were as it is shown below in Table 2. Most students have parents with secondary education. Approximately a quarter of parents have finished the 8-year school and one in five children have parents with university education and postgraduate education.

Table 2. Absolute frequencies of parental educational level on the basis of gender

Gender	Parents education level							
	Mothers				Fathers			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1. Females	3	8	2	1	6	7	1	0
2. Males	5	8	3	2	6	7	3	2
Total	8	16	5	3	12	14	4	2

Note. 1= 8-years school education, 2= high school, 3= university, 4= postgraduate

Nearly half of adolescents' mothers in this sample are unemployed. Whereas regarding their fathers, very few of them are unemployed, but it is noticed that those employed do hard work with long hours that surpass 10 hours per day. About a quarter of them are obliged to have two jobs. More than half of the parents work in the service sector. The level of the family income of adolescents divided by gender is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Frequency of financial position on the basis of adolescents gender

Gender	Financial situation				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Females	5	5	2	1	1
2. Males	6	7	3	2	0
Total	11	12	5	3	1

Note. 1=under 40 000, 2=40 0001 to 60 000, 3=600001 to 90 000, 4= 90 001 until 120 000, 5=over 120 001leke

² They have a personal room at the apartment

³ Shares the room

4.2 The level of family functioning (cohesion and flexibility) and type of adolescents' family

The first aim of this study was to identify through inventory of family functioning (Olson, Portner, Bell, & Filsinger, 1982) the level of family functioning (cohesion and flexibility) and type of adolescents family. According to reports by adolescents results that most of the families of adolescents who participated in this study are classified into low levels of family cohesion. Regarding flexibility, families result to be structured and flexible. The data were classified based on gender in order to have a more complete picture. In Table 4 we notice small differences between genders in terms of cohesion, where girls seem to perceive their families as more cohesive than boys, but boys perceive families as less flexible than girls.

Table 4. Absolute frequencies of family functioning on the basis of gender

	Female	Male	Total
Family cohesion			
1. Entirely disengaged	9	14	23
2. Divided	3	3	6
3. Connected	1	1	2
4. Entirely connected	1		1
Family flexibility			
1. Rigid	0	3	3
2. Structured	5	5	10
3. Flexible	8	7	15
4. Caotic	1	3	4
Family functioning/ Type of family			
1. Extrem functioning	9	13	22
2. Medium functioning	4	4	8
3. Balanced functioning	1	1	2

4.3 The impact of family functioning on adolescents academic achievements

Adolescents participating in this study have the following achievements,, as described below in Table 5 which shows in detail student achievement in mathematics and mother tongue, the average grade in the most important subjects and gender.

Table 5. Frequences of academic achievements on the basis of adolescents gender

Gender	Level of achievements											
	Math				Language				Average			
	H ⁴	M ⁵	L ⁶	Total	H	M	L	Total	H	M	L	Total
1. Females	5	5	4	14	6	5	3	14	6	5	3	14
2. Males	2	8	8	18	4	9	5	18	3	9	6	18
Total	7	13	12	32	10	14	8	32	9	14	9	32

The grouping of data after completing the inventory of family functioning showed that academic achievements are related to family functioning level. More specifically, there is no case of high achievement in mathematics to be classified at the level of *entirely separated* of the family cohesion, while it is observed that students with average and low scores belongs to this category. In the subject of the mother tongue, more than half of students with high results are classified into high levels of family cohesion. Even in terms of average grade, the students with average and low ratings are those who claim to be *completely disconnected emotionally* from their families. In terms of family flexibility, even though there is a wide distribution of values compared to the case of family cohesion, it is observed that students with high scores are classified

⁴High level of achievements (grades 9 and 10)

⁵ Medium level of achievements (grades 7 and 8)

⁶ Low level of achievements (grades 5 and 6)

into high levels of flexibility (structured and flexible family) both for the achievements in mathematics and mother tongue as well as in terms of average grade.

Likewise, concerning the values of family functioning, more than half of the students with high scores in all cases (academic achievements in mathematics, mother tongue, and average grade) are classified in the category of medium and balanced family functioning. On the other hand students with low scores in all cases (academic achievements in mathematics, mother tongue, and average grade) are mainly classified into the category of extreme family functioning. Table 6. presents us with detailed data

Table 6. Frequences of academic achievements on the basis of adolescents gender

Family functioning	Level of achievements									Total	
	Math			Language			Average				
	H	M	L	H	M	L	H	M	L		
Family cohesion											
1. Entirely disengaged	x	11	12	3	12	8	3	12	8	23	
2. Divided	5	1	x	6	x	x	5	x	1	6	
3. Connected	2	x	x	1	1	x	1	1	x	2	
4. Entirely connected	x	1	x	x	1	x	x	1	x	1	
Total	7	13	12	10	14	8	9	14	9	32	
Family flexibility											
1. Rigid	x	1	2	x	1	2	x	1	2	3	
2. Structured	4	3	3	4	5	1	4	4	2	10	
3. Flexible	3	7	5	5	7	3	5	7	3	15	
4. Caotic	x	2	2	x	2	2	x	2	2	4	
Total	7	13	12	10	14	8	9	14	9	32	
Family functioning/Type of family											
1. Extreme functioning	3	8	11	3	12	7	2	11	9	22	
2. Medium functioning	3	4	1	5	2	1	5	3	x	8	
3. Balanced functioning	1	1	x	2	x	x	2	x	x	2	
Total	7	13	12	10	14	8	9	14	9	32	

4.4 Demographic characteristics and differences in family functioning of adolescents

To understand the impact of demographic characteristics of the family in its functioning was made a division of the data collected through interviews and conversations with adolescents and their parents, based on the findings concerning the dimensions of family functioning.

4.4.1 Families with extreme functioning

The majority of this category is composed of families that have arrived these last 15 years in the capital. It is noticed a low status of parents' education and low social status. The majority of unemployed parents belong to this category and in most cases, only one parent is employed. These families are characterized by low level of financial incomes, high density of their dwelling and the highest number of children compared to the other two groups. According to the data of the interviews and conversations with both parents and adolescents, these families are characterized by lack of family peace, stress associated with the lack of security for the future and difficult living conditions (they live mainly in rented flats with improper conditions at suburban areas of Tirana).

It is interesting to mention the fact that even though a significant number of teenagers that have arrived in Tirana in the past 15 years were interviewed in urban schools in the center and district schools of Tirana ring, they were residing in suburban neighborhoods. These students travelled each day organized by minibus to attend school⁷. During discussions it was revealed that parents made efforts to integrate their children and send them to attend quality schools in Tirana, arguing that the main reason of their removal from the cities of origin was mainly connected with their employment and education of children. Although their parents made sacrifices, considering the financial bill associated with the attendance

⁷ In the city of Tirana there is a high concentration of population and therefore schools are 10 minutes away on foot from the dwellings of childrens.

of school away from the apartment, from interviews and conversations is revealed that in the majority of the cases they do not provide support and assistance in lessons. In most cases this assistance is not given because of their low level of education, lack of financial ability for non-direct support (attendance of courses, not part of the school) for the the creation of conditions of learning at home, but also because of their workload.

According to adolescents reporting but also from their parents reporting, it is noticed that this type of family is characterized by emotional distance among family members where it is evident that these families have a very low level of family cohesion. The level of flexibility is presented with scattered values, but what draws attention is that all the cases of rigid families belong to this type of functioning. However, we must emphasize that in terms of indicators of family flexibility such as; safety, leadership, roles, and rules in the family, this group is no different from the other two groups.

To detect family emotional ties within this category were addressed these questions for parents and teenagers: How do you support each other and how close to each other do you feel in your family? Does your child ask for your help in learning and how do you support him/her? Do you need help for the lessons? How do your parents support you)? Thematic analysis of interviews with parents showed that even though most parents consider very important the family's need for support, especially when family members face difficulties, declare that they do not provide this support for various reasons. Fathers mainly said they have no time since they have to work long hours to meet the economic needs of the family. Even those parents who are employed say it is very difficult for them to keep their job and therefore try to do other jobs part time in order to provide for their families in a difficult moment.

Here is what a parent explains:

"I would like so much to help my daughter for her lesson in school, but when I come back from work she is asleep. I do two different jobs per day because I'm afraid that one of the positions could close and if it so..... I have the other one that's not that good, but just to feed the kids. Tirana is too expensive and we don't have any support here. During weekends I try to help her in the lessons, but you know what?! The lessons are more difficult than they were in our time. I've been very good at math, and my average grade in this subject in high school was 9, even though we didn't have the financial means and couldn't attend university. But these lessons now..... ouch.. I can't understand anything at all!!!"
(male 43-years old)

On the other hand adolescents also report other types of problems with their parents apart from the fact that they are unable to help children because of the difficulties presented by the curricula. Adolescents say that their parents are worried all the time and focused on their work and problems. When someone has a problem the family tries to solve it or help each other at weekends or days off. Here's what a boy says.

"I needed mom to come at school in order to speak with math teacher, but during the working days you can't even mention leaving work early because she's afraid of being fired. She had to work two Sundays in a row in order to have a free day to come and meet the teacher".

In order to discover the *family boundaries and decision-making* within the family these questions were addressed to parents and adolescents: Who do discuss your problems with? Do you consider the family opinion when you take your decisions?

From the analysis of data collected through interviews and conversations with parents and adolescents results that the majority of parents report that when decisions are related with their family, they talk with partners and take their opinion, but in most cases they make decisions themselves. There are very few parents who report (only 2) that when the decisions are related to their children they get their opinion as well. It is noted that mothers who do not work usually leave decisions in the hands of husbands. It is observed, however, that family decisions are taken by men even when problems are discussed in the family.

Concerning adolescents reports, they indicate that they mostly discuss their problems with siblings and close friends. Youngsters show some reason why they do this. Firstly, they show that their parents are too busy and stressed by their jobs and for this reason it is difficult to find a suitable moment to make a proper conversation. Secondly, they show fear of punishment for expressing their views openly. Thirdly, almost half of young people think that their parents do not understand them and it is better to talk to people outside the family.

Here it is an expression from a girl:

"There is a guy in my class who is very peevish, harassing me all the time, sometimes he kick me and sometimes rips my books and notebooks. Few days ago he threw corrector ink in my pants. I have complained so many times to the teacher, but the teacher does not deal with him and he not even listens to her at all. I wanted to talk to my mom, but you can't find

a moment when she is calm. She starts working early in the morning and she is always tired. One Sunday I thought to talk with her, but something came out and she left the apartment. Even if I spoke to her she would make me guilty. In fact she doesn't want me to wear those jeans at school. I talked to a friend and she suggested to ask the teacher at least to change my desk".

To understand more about the way this category interacts in the free time, in common residential spaces, with friends, and during recreation, we addressed to both parents and young people these questions: How do you organize your time free and who do you spend it with? By grouping the data of parents and adolescents, results that family spends very little time together. Often parents do not have the day off neither Saturday nor Sunday. Even when they have a day off parents use it to do the shopping for the week and for family chores. In these conditions, during the weekend, children spend their leisure time communicating with friends on social networks and watching movies or listening to music. They say that they want to invite their friends home, but can not do so because their homes are not as they should be and do not have the right conditions for inviting friends.

Low level of income does not give families the opportunity to go outdoors for recreational activities. Less than a third of parents report that spending time together often turns into dialogues of requests and accountability. Approximately there is the same number of young people who think that when parents stay at home they ask their children to do housework and study. Also, young people report that it is exactly at weekends or days off that their parents quarrel the most. According to them it is mainly related to economic reasons, or to the time that spouses, mostly men, spend outside the family, but there are not few the cases when spouses quarrel because of the interference of other persons of the family (parents or brothers and sisters of the couple) in couple's problems. In some cases the extended family becomes a barrier for the family to spend nice time together. T. B, a 50 year old father of three, who lives with his parents, thinks that it is impossible to relax and find peace in the family. In his opinion, free time is spent better away from the family.

"Where to stay in our house? There are so many people and one can not even chat. Even when I have time and come home early, my wife starts saying we need money for this and for that or we need to visit him or her. Kids with their things (...). Elders with their illnesses... You get crazy. When I leave work a little early, I meet with friends to play billiards or for a drink and a game of cards..."

From youth reports we found out that fathers often spend their free time with friends rather than with their family. Here is what an adolescent says:

"Dad comes home very late every day. He can not stand being home with us when we do our homework and mom prepares food for tomorrow. This makes mom very angry and she is all the time in bad humor. She is worried that my dad spends money, not because she expects something from him. He only does shopping time after time ..."

What is even more disturbing emerges from free conversations with mothers who indicate that their husbands spend a great deal of time and money in gambling or sports betting. So many conflicts arise within the family, which in these conditions loses incomes, harmony, tranquility and attention to children. Apparently this is a tendency to make quick profits without efforts in a society where it is hard to find a job, but even if you find one, you could hardly keep it. Furthermore, in Albania you are not always paid properly for your job. People can work all day long and not be able to provide even the basic living needs.

However, almost one in five parents shows that they try to plan their weekend in order to stay together with the family and have fun. B. XH. the mother of two teenage children says:

"When the weather is good it is easier. We go out for a coffee and time flies away. On Friday, after finishing the housework I do the shopping. I try to buy things that kids like. We gather around the television and watch a movie together, but the boy often wants to go out with friends and wants money. When I can't give him any money he says: "(...) It is always the same story with you! You buy us some lollipops and put us in front of the TV as if we were babies."

4.4.2 Families with medium functioning

Based on the analysis of data collected from interviews and conversations, medium functioning families are mainly resident families. Four out of the six resident families have nuclear structure. Whereas concerning the two other families, one is an extended family and the other is one-parent family due to divorce. Two of the families that have moved to Tirana these last 15 years, part of this group, are both nuclear. These families are mainly characterized by the high level

of parents education, with both parents employed, but also with a satisfactory social status. If you see the professional status of these two families, one belongs to the high officials of the state and the other one to the business sphere. The economic status of these families results in much higher levels compared to families with extreme functioning. Mostly, families of this group have their own flat, only in one case the family has rented the flat. Mainly, these are families with two children, who in most of the cases have their own room. The parents of these families give much value to the connection between family members, and therefore plan their activities by creating space for both their professional life and family life which are programmed very carefully.

What stands out in most of the cases concerning the level of cohesion of these families is that they belong to the divided and connected level which make up medium levels of cohesion and in only one case it results to be fully connected, more specifically this is the family with divorced parents. Families are connected emotionally which shows that they constantly support each other and feel connected with their family members. Also, parents seem to take special care and devote time to support children in their lessons, and also do their utmost to create conditions for learning not only at home but also supporting their children with private tutors, especially for mathematics and foreign languages. Children of these families attend sports clubs, swimming, dancing and in two cases they take lessons in both drawing and music. Families appear in family boundaries and open decision making. Problems are discussed and usually are taken joint decisions. It is obvious that these families spend time together and give special attention to time spent together. Family members communicate with each other's friends and have common interests. Usually families use weekends to spend some qualitative time with each other and family friends. Here's what a 42 years old mother of two says about the weekend:

"Every night after we finish what we have to do, we sit together in the living room to watch television together, discuss problems and talk about the way we spent the day. Also we share ideas and plan the routine for tomorrow. However, the weekend is very important for us. It is the most beautiful moment as we have a lot of time to spend together. We often invite our friends or children's friends for Saturday's lunch or go out for coffee and rarely for lunch"

The levels of flexibility of these families are mainly medium. These families are characterized by security to express their opinions, where children have their place in decision making. In terms of roles and responsibilities in the family, even though they are separated, the family has the flexibility to react when certain conditions arise. Teenage B.L says about her family.

"Even though mum is our cook, yesterday I cooked. I did not make anything special. Salad and pasta. Mom and dad went to see our aunt because her husband had surgery and I did not leave the little brother without lunch."

Family rules in this group are clear. Although they may change in specific cases, the children of these families and parents know their limits.

"On Friday I went home late. I know that my parents are very strict about this, but my close friend turned 15 and so... Mommy and Daddy knew that I would be late, but I exaggerated and they told me off". (K.M. male 14 years)

"I want like my friends to dress (...) or hang out with friends, but in our family it is clear what you can do and what you can not do." (L.D. female 14 years)

4.4.3 Families with balanced functioning

In this sample were identified only two families with balanced functioning. Both of them belong to resident families. Families in this category have similar characteristics to families with medium functioning but differ by the very large commitment of fathers in supporting children's learning and their devotion to the family, ranging from communication and shared decision-making to the division of duties and responsibilities in the family as well as the time both parents devote to the family. In both cases parents show devotion to free time, creating conditions for mutual entertainment.

"Mom was making lunch on Saturday. Dad went out to help a friend who also is a family friend, when suddenly both dad and his friend with his family showed up. They have a girl and a boy, just like us. They had taken with them meatballs and steaks along with the grill for the barbecue. Mom put the food in a bowl and we took it with us. We also took a couple of blankets from those that we used when we were kids. They sent us to Dajti. We played with the ball all together. Oh god how fun it was!" (S.K. female 15 years)

5. Conclusions

In this sample academic achievements' of adolescents showed positive correlation with levels of family functioning). Families with balanced and medium levels of functioning (cohesion and flexibility) have children with higher achievement. This means that teenagers who claim that their family has the following characteristics: a) high social and economic status; b) residing in the capital for many decades; c) high educational level of the parents; d) devotion of both parents to family, but in particular fathers' devotion; e) parents that are very clear in their goals, and balanced concerning the ratio job/family; f) parents good at planning time with family and g) fathers' commitment in supporting children's learning, have higher achievements and belong to families with balanced functioning.

Meanwhile, adolescents who belong to families with medium levels of functioning, mainly, have average results, to very good results. These families are characterized by: a) middle and high socio-economic status; b) resident in the capital for more than 15 years; c) medium to high educational level of the parents; d) mainly reside in their homes and some of the children have personal rooms; of) in general, their children feel supported by family members, and they have academic support (through programs and courses) as well. Also in these families is evident the monitoring of their children; f) tendency to talk with family members about their problems; g) appreciation of the connection between family members, which leads to the planning of their activities by creating space for their professional life and family life which the results to be programmed carefully. Family members communicate with each other's friends and common interests. Usually families use the weekend to spend qualitative time with the family where family friends are also present.

Whereas families of adolescents that according to their reporting resulted in extreme levels of functioning have children with low and average results. Characteristics of these families are: a) low social and economic status; b) families arrived in the past 15 years in the capital; c) low and medium educational level of parents; d) mainly reside in houses (rented or obtained on loan) in suburban areas with high density dwelling; e) higher number of children compared to the other groups; f) poor emotional connection with each other; g) lack of the feeling of support from family members; i) lack of support in lessons and their monitoring; j) tendency to talk about their problems with people outside the family; k) emphasized lack of sharing time with family; l) the transmission of tension and stress of parents to children in that little time they spend with them; and m) lack of organization of leisure time.

On the other hand, the way the family functions indicated connection to SES which is related not only to levels of family functioning but also determines the way of interaction between family members. More specifically, families with high educational status are more likely to be employed in positions that are not only of high status but also well paid. In itself it means an increase of economic welfare, but not only. Of course, a person who has a good social position, in some cases has more free time, but even when this free time is missing, educational level is one of the factors that affects a good and qualitative organization of time that family spends together. Also, the financial opportunity has an impact in some aspects that increase the qualitative time such as: moves on weekends, invitation of friends home for lunch or dinner, or attendance of social life of the city. It is the qualitative time spent with family members that favors the emotional connection between them. Likewise, favorable economic situations enable the realization of the individual needs of family members, despite emotional interdependence.

In a study conducted by Bërçolli (2005) is emphasized the fact that after the change of political system in Albania, after the 1990s, more than 40% of the population has migrated within the country. In the past two decades, Tirana is a city that has suffered the largest demographic growth (INSTAT, 2011a) and the main cause of this migration is undoubtedly related to the high level of poverty, which forces families to move from one settlement to another. However, the 2005 study conducted by the UNDP, estimated that 80% of families that have migrated within the country live in extreme poverty. What stands out in this study is the fact that families that have arrived in Tirana the last 15 years (in this sample) not only belong to families with low incomes, but appear mainly with extreme functioning and it is these families who have children with low academic achievement. This is connected with the fact that migrant families face great difficulties and try to cope with the difficulties that displacement brings with it. In most cases they devote most of the time to work which is seen as the main point of reference in order to survive. In these conditions, little or no time is left to fulfill parental obligations, where I would mention attention to progress in school or emotional support parent-child. The hard life of the migrants, even when the migration happens within the country is mentioned by Davin (1999), who assesses the internal migration comparable to external migration not only in the legal aspect, but also in terms of the difficulties they face and the results they have both in economic and social terms.

Furthermore, concern for academic achievements at the age of adolescence is fully justified since there is scientific evidence that achievements in adolescence are the basis for further personal progress (Nelson & Phelps 1966), but also their countries' progress (Hanushek, & Woessmann 2008; Hanushek, & Woessmann 2011). This study is another

scientific evidence that helps to understand the important role of the family and its dynamics in children's education. It is certified that family functioning, in particular, family cohesion, as one of the most important dimensions of the family, has been on the focus of EU policies. This attitude is embodied in the resolution of the year 2010 (2010) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, which says: "Investing in family cohesion as a development factor in times of crisis" (p. 4 of the draft recommendation). This call is addressed to the governments of member states to assess in their national policies, specific policies for the family. In draft A of the "Resolution for the Family," of European Parliamentary Assembly, in paragraph 6, family policies are considered very important not only from the social point of view, but also from the aspect of financial benefits.

This is why governments EU countries are required to be alert regarding the impact of social policies in the support of families. For this are provided some directives, one of which is recommendation 6.8 which strongly urged governments to focus on disadvantaged children and dysfunctional families; as it is judged that there is increased risk of poverty for children coming from these families. "From studies, -adds the resolution - the increased risk of poverty among children in single-parent families is found to be reinforced by disadvantage at school, as well as poorer health and housing outcomes. These children are more likely to be exposed to risks that jeopardise their educational achievement, which then affect their future prospects "(p. 3) :

6. Recommendations

At the national level it is recommended the development of a document concerning Cross-Cutting Policies for the healthy functioning of the family and its social support, which will help families to better realize their responsibilities and increase the opportunity for a balanced family functioning. At the local level would be reasonable to ask the cooperation and interaction between structures that support families such as the gender officials network in municipalities, and districts as well as schools which are closer to children and know better their dynamics. At school level, we suggest working with multidisciplinary teams to identify healthy families (with medium level functioning) and those with extreme functioning (not only using instruments for measuring the dimensions of family functioning, but also by systematically analysing academic achievements, as this study showed that they have positive relationship with family cohesion and family functioning) which will enable support for families in the right time.

In Tirana there are many families that come from towns and villages across the country, thus it is necessary to help students to realize different adaptations according to their needs. It is suggested that psychologists should help the pedagogical staff increase the culture of effective communication. Supporting students and their families with psycho-education would be a good way to help in achieving higher academic results. Also if families which present signs of dysfunctions were identified in time, it would be easier and more effective to help with assistance and institutional interaction.

This study has various limitations as well. As a research which is qualitative in its nature it can not make generalizations. It aims to extend opportunities to better understand the variables associated with students' achievement, but also the relation of family functioning and interactional variables with these achievements. Furthermore, this qualitative study gives ideas about other studies of this nature. More specifically are recommended further studies such as: a) Study of cultural and contextual factors that influence the levels of family functioning, particularly of family cohesion; b) Study of the impact of the time of living in the host city on the integration of migratory families and the factors that play a role in the integration; and c) In-depth study of the phenomenon of migration in Albania and the connection of migratory contexts with family functioning and children's progress at school.

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