

Family life satisfaction – Perception of the youth and their parents

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Abstract

Family satisfaction is significant and complex concept that includes personal satisfaction and relationship satisfaction among family members. The aim of this paper is to present and discuss the preliminary young people's and their parents' perception family satisfaction analysis. The research was conducted on a convenient sample of students/young people (N=50) and their parents (N=84). For the purposes of this research The Family Satisfaction Scale from FACES IV instrument (Olson, 2010) was used. The mentioned scale measures the positive aspects of relationship among the family members. The results indicate that young people and their parents are generally satisfied with their family life. On some items of the scale there is statistically significant difference among young people and their parents. Parents are more satisfied with their family life than their children. These results are encouraging especially in the context of COVID 19 pandemics and increasing numbers of undesirable family relationships.

Keywords: family relationships, family life satisfaction, young people, parents.

1. Introduction

Considering different approaches in examining family relationships and main aim of this paper, we do not aspire to theoretical comprehensiveness, but refer to the complexity of family relationships and the importance of participants' self-perception of their families. According to both traditional and modern theories (historically – institutional, sociological, structurally – functional, psychological approaches, development theories etc.) it can be concluded that family represents a “*living organism*” which, due to complex interactional relationships and environmental influences, experiences numerous changes and adaptations to the “new” qualities and levels of interactions (Zloković & Lukajić, 2016). Elkind (1995) and Stacy (1993) consider family as an ideological and symbolic construct determined by the very specific emotional relationships within it, enabling us to understand it as a primary emotional and social community of parents and their children (and the rest of the relatives) that live together and perform their family as well as interpersonal functions in a unique way. After certain period of time and inevitable transformation from “traditional” to “modern” family, it looks as if family life becomes understood as process of a depatriarchalization and detraditionalization of life, the time of distant, shallow and weakened interpersonal relationships as well as weakening of essential parental functions that want to go in the direction of structural transformation, creating of autonomous

family area and establishing of more equal and egalitarian relationships between sexes and generations (Milić, 2010; Zloković & Lukajić, 2016). The variety of structure, relationships, functions and the ways of forming and surviving of the family in regards to external and internal influences provides the diversity of family incidence, implying that every family is unique and that, in line with the postmodern views, a unique definition should be created for each family (Janković, 2008).

- Individual's perspective of life satisfaction represents one of the assumptions for more successful family functioning.
- The youth and their parents are generally satisfied with their families, considering that the parents show higher satisfaction than their children.
- The differences in the participants' perception were found on family structure and total monthly family income variables.
- Participants that live in two-parent families show higher satisfaction than those that live in one-parent families.
- Regarding total monthly family income, the results show that participants with higher income express higher family satisfaction.

Relationships between family members are embedded into broader family system and are more often than not dependent on the relationships with the rest of the family members (Cox & Paley, 1997). According to Burges (1927) the family is primarily a process, an interactive system affected by all of its members; it is not a simple structure or household – social unit. We cannot understand the behavior of one of the family members if we do not examine one's relationship with the other members of the family, the nature of their interaction, development and the changes in their personality. Additionally, one of the fundamental functions of the family is seeking help as well as support for the individual needs of the other family members. Even though it is difficult to determine the ways which would create a positive family atmosphere, certain strategies such as open communication, mutual respect and the relationship equality, showing mutual interests, encouragement, showing mutual interest and encouraging the expression of one's attitudes and opinions as well as encouraging the need to give an opportunity to every family member to explain their wishes, interests, attitudes and opinions may encourage it. From the problems' perspective, studies of families are often based on the examinations of changes in the family's structure, "separated" family problems, family violence, the influence of trauma on the family members, parents' competencies etc. in order to improve the quality of life within the family. In that context, this paper starts from the questions regarding family life satisfaction in addition to family communication and cohesion with the goal of encouraging future opportunities in the family empowerment as well as finding conceptual methods that would increase the level of positive family relationships and healthy development of children and the youth (Zloković & Čekolj, 2018). Mutual family cohesion, support, positive and encouraging family atmosphere, the way and level of family communication and its interaction with wider social environment, self-perception of satisfaction with family and family life can encourage, but also slow down and limit one's personality development (Zloković, 2012). According to Čudina-Obradović and Obradović (2003), the experience of parenting consists of the satisfaction with the child, oneself as a parent, established relationship between oneself and one's child and its development. They believe that the experience of parenting can be either positive, negative or with mixed signs.

In the studies examining family relationships, self-perception of personal feelings while performing parental tasks, mutual relationships, satisfaction and quality of family life is often expected and needed. Despite the opportunities to provide socially expected and acceptable answers, self-evaluations of personal emotions often represent valuable source of information. Self-perception testifies on the level of awareness of parents about his role in his child's life.

Additionally, it stimulates children/young people's questioning of certain personal contributions to the quality of family life.

Margaret Mead claims that "family is the strongest institution that we possess and we owe it our humanity" (Aračić & Nikodem, 2010: 295). Most of Slavic people share the opinion about the importance of family today where 99% of Croats define it as common good and hold it in the highest regard (Aračić & Nikodem, 2010). This represents an optimistic information that represents a basis in many interdisciplinary activities that deal with improvements of family functioning.

Literature review indicates a wide palette of definitions regarding the life satisfaction usually as a both cognitive and affective category. More often than not, life satisfaction, well-being and quality of life are being equated. According to Kočo-Vukadin, Novak and Križan (2016) the life satisfaction construct is positioned in the broader area of subjective wellbeing construct which is being studied within the frame of superior quality of life phenomena. Subjective wellbeing consists of both affective and cognitive component. Campbell, Converse and Rogers (1976, as cited in Diener, 1984) state that satisfaction represents "observed difference between aspirations and achievements that ranges from the perception of fulfillment to the perception of deprivation". Pavot et al. (1991, as cited in Penezić, 2006) define life satisfaction as "individual's global evaluation of their life". Fujita and Diener (2005) regard life satisfaction as a reflection on life in its entirety which transcends the experience of positive emotions. Penezić (2006) claims that life satisfaction represents cognitive evaluation of individual's entire life, through which each individual evaluates their life. Family's perception of life satisfaction is relatively unexplored area, thus making this paper a valuable scientific contribution to the main problem of this scientific project: The family empowerment for the development of positive relationships and family cohesion at the University of Rijeka.

2. Methodology

This paper has to aims: (I) to examine the youth and their parents' perception of family satisfaction and (II) analyze the differences in perceptions of family satisfaction in regards to the gender and education of participants, family structure as well as total monthly family income.

From the defined aims of the paper, based on the presented theoretical framework in the previous part of the paper, the following hypotheses have arisen: (I) There is a statistically significant difference in the perception of family satisfaction of the youth and their parents; (II) There is a statistically significant difference in the perception of family satisfaction of the youth and their parents in regards to their socio-demographic and socio-cultural characteristics.

2.1 Participants/ Sample

134 students of Pedagogy at the University of Rijeka (N=50) and their parents (N=84) participated in the study. The average age of the students, i.e. the youth, is 21.76 (SD=2.28), while the average age of their parents is 50.25 (SD=4.80). Additionally, 42 female students (31%) and 8 male students (6%) as well as 44 mothers (33%) and 40 fathers (30%) participated in the study. Most parents have finished their high school education (69%), while most of the youth has received their bachelor's degree (46%). Most of the participants live in two-parent families with two biological parents and there are only few participants that live in one-parent families (6 participants or 3 one-parent families).

2.2 Method

The data was gathered during 2019/2020 academic year using the survey method and convenience sampling. The participants were introduced to the subject as well as the aims of this study. Additionally, they were informed about their right to remain anonymous as well as the possibility to withdraw from the study.

2.3 Instruments

This study used Family satisfaction subscale, a fundamental part of FACES IV instrument (Olson, 2010) which examines positive aspects of family relationships. Aforementioned subscale was translated and adapted by Ljubetić, Reić Ercegovac and Mandarić Vukšić. For the purpose of this study, the subscale was taken and used with the authors' consent. The subscale was translated by using the double translation method with the aim of determining the credibility of the translation where the subscale was firstly translated from English to Croatian, followed by the translation from Croatian into English (Ljubetić, Reić Ercegovac & Mandarić Vukušić, 2020).

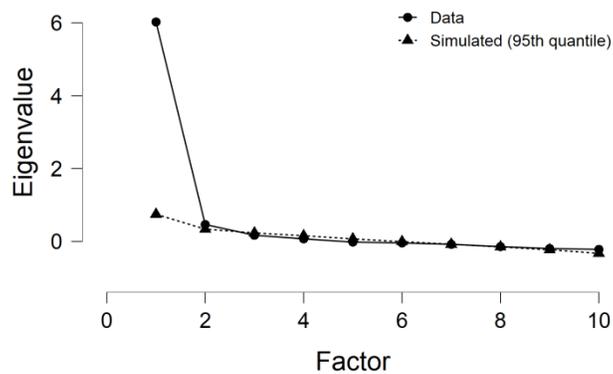
Family satisfaction subscale consists of 10 items in which the participants evaluated the degree of satisfaction on the associated assessment scale consisting of five degrees (1 – very dissatisfied; 5 – extremely satisfied). Higher result on scale indicated higher family satisfaction.

Data analysis was conducted by using the IBM SPSS Statistics 20 statistics software. Univariate (frequencies and percentages, means, standard deviations and mean ranks) as well as bivariate statistics methods (Mann-Whitney U test and Kruskal-Wallis test) were used in order to determine the differences in attitudes in regards to sex, education, family structure and total monthly family income. All tests and analyses were conducted on the 5% statistical significance level.

In order to verify the factorial structure of the subscale's Croatian version, exploratory factor analysis with maximum likelihood method of factor extraction was conducted. Verification of suitability of the used analysis has shown that the data is suitable – Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test value is 0.917 which is in line with the recommended value (0.6) (Table 1.). Moreover, Bartlett's test of sphericity shows the statistical significance of $p < 0.01$. The number of significant factors is determined by Cattell's scree test criteria as well as oblimin rotation of factorial axes.

Table 1. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test

	MSA
Overall MSA	0.917
The degree of closeness between family members	0.951
Your family's ability to cope with stress	0.908
Your family's ability to be flexible	0.912
Your family's ability to share positive experiences	0.915
The quality of communication between family members	0.936
Your family's ability to resolve conflicts	0.908
The amount of time you spend together as a family	0.921
The way problems are discussed	0.897
The fairness of criticism in your family	0.910
Family members concern for each other	0.910



Graph 1. Scree-test – determining the number of significant factors

The starting maximum likelihood extraction of significant factors has shown 2 significant factors (Graph 1). Further examining showed that the “Degree of closeness” item has equal saturation on both factors which led to its removal from the further analysis.

Table 2. Factor extraction – final

Factor Loadings	Communication aspects	Affective aspects	Uniqueness
Your family’s ability to cope with stress		0.773	0.322
Your family’s ability to be flexible		0.902	0.280
Your family’s ability to share positive experiences		0.692	0.307
The quality of communication between family members	0.761		0.212
Your family’s ability to resolve conflicts	0.679		0.215
The amount of time you spend together as a family	0.812		0.548
The way problems are discussed	0.905		0.151
The fairness of criticism in your family	0.499		0.536
Family members concern for each other		0.592	0.414

Retained factors explain a total of 67% of the variance of the results, with the 36% being first factor’s contribution while the second factor’s contribution scored 31%. Therefore, it can be concluded that no additional factors are present. Exploratory factor analysis showed that two-factor structure is present.

The first factor, which includes communication processes and the abilities to cope resolve conflicts, was named “Communication aspects”, while the second factor, which includes the ability to cope with stress, flexibility, positive experiences and family’s concern for each other, was named “Affective aspects” (Table 2).

First factor reliability analysis was conducted on a total of 5 items. Cronbach’s α showed high reliability value, $\alpha=0.897$. All items were retained because they show similar means. Second factor reliability analysis was conducted on a total of 4 items. Cronbach’s α showed high reliability value, $\alpha=0.887$. All items were retained because they show similar means.

3. Results

Before the test results are presented, we are going to show the results of descriptive analysis. Total descriptive results of the youth and their parents show that the satisfaction level is reasonably high throughout all items (over 50%). The biggest percentage of participants expressed high or extreme satisfaction with the statements about the family's ability to share positive experiences (80.6%) as well as the level of family members' concern for each other (86.6%). On the other hand, 20.9% of participants have expressed dissatisfaction with the statement about the family's ability to resolve conflicts. Apart from that, the similar percentage of participants has expressed dissatisfaction with the statement regarding the fairness of criticism within the family (19.4%).

Mann-Whitney U test was used in order to determine the differences in family life satisfaction in regards to sex and education of the participants. Results analysis showed that there is no statistically significant difference between the groups.

The aforementioned test was used to determine the differences in family life satisfaction in regards to group affiliation (The youth or parents). Results analysis showed statistically significant difference in the Affective aspect factor ($U=1507,500$, $Z=-2,734$, $p>0.01$). The parent express higher satisfaction than the youth as they have higher mean ranks (mean rank of the parents = 74.55; mean rank of the youth = 55.65). Even though the difference between the groups exists, group affiliation has little impact on the family life satisfaction ($r=0,24$). For more organized view, the results obtained by Likert scale are merged into three categories in which the sum of the results on the first two and the last two levels is presented (Very dissatisfied + somewhat dissatisfied; Generally satisfied; Very satisfied + extremely satisfied). Separated descriptive results are presented in Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 3. Descriptive results of the individual items of the youth (N=50)

ITEM	F (%)			M	SD
	1+2 ¹	3 ²	4+5 ³		
Your family's ability to cope with stress	11(22)	13(26)	26(52)	3.420	1.031
Your family's ability to be flexible	7(14)	13(26)	30(60)	3.760	1.098
Your family's ability to share positive experiences	5(10)	8(16)	36(72)	4.000	1.099
The quality of communication between family members	9(18)	18(36)	23(46)	3.320	1.019
Your family's ability to resolve conflicts	17(32)	12(24)	21(42)	3.120	1.271
The amount of time you spend together as a family	7(14)	11(22)	30(64)	3.660	1.042
The way problems are discussed	12(24)	17(34)	21(42)	3.240	1.187
The fairness of criticism in your family	16(32)	20(40)	14(28)	2.920	1.046
Family members concern for each other	5(10)	4(8)	41(82)	4.280	0.990

¹ Very dissatisfied + somewhat dissatisfied.

² Generally satisfied.

³ Very satisfied + extremely satisfied.

Table 4. Descriptive results of the individual items of the parents (N=84)

ITEM	F (%)			M	SD
	1+2 ⁴	3 ⁵	4+5 ⁶		
Your family's ability to cope with stress	5(6)	15(17.9)	64(76.21)	3.892	0.864
Your family's ability to be flexible	4(4.8)	19(22.6)	61(72.7)	3.964	0.884
Your family's ability to share positive experiences	1(1.2)	11(13.1)	72(85.7)	4.4345	0.752
The quality of communication between family members	10(11.9)	19(22.6)	55(65.5)	3.738	1.065
Your family's ability to resolve conflicts	11(13.1)	17(20.2)	56(66.7)	3.750	1.085
The amount of time you spend together as a family	11(13.1)	27(32.1)	46(54.8)	3.631	1.169
The way problems are discussed	10(11.9)	23(27.4)	51(60.7)	3.654	1.011
The fairness of criticism in your family	10(11.9)	31(36.9)	43(33.1)	3.571	0.960
Family members concern for each other	6(7.2)	2(2.4)	75(89.3)	4.494	0.902

Due to too small groups, family structure variable was recoded, i.e. “two biological parents” and “two parents (1 biological and foster mother/ foster father)” categories were merged as they both included two parents, while the other category included only one-parent family structure. No participants categorized themselves as “adoptive parents” and “foster parents” due to which both categories got excluded from the analysis. Mann – Whitney U test was used in order to determine the differences in the family life satisfaction in regards to the type of participant’s family structure (two-parent or one-parent structure). Statistically significant difference was found between the groups in both factors ($U_1=225,500$, $Z=-2,196$, $p<0.05$; $U_2=209,500$, $Z=-2,332$, $p<0.05$), where members of two-parent families show higher satisfaction (mean rank_factor1 = 69.22; factor2 = 68.32) than the members of one-parent families (mean rank_factor1 = 36.21; factor2 = 33.93). Family structure explains small effect of family satisfaction (factor 1 – $r = 0.19$; factor 2 – $r = 0.20$).

Kruskal-Wallis Test was used in order to verify the difference in family life satisfaction in regards to total monthly family income. Statistically significant difference was found on both factors ($p_1<0,01$; $p_2<0,05$). Due to the fact that total monthly family income included 9 categories, post-hoc test (Mann-Whitney U test) was performed for each category pair. Statistically significant difference was found between five pairs, while medium effect was found in two pairs (Table 5).

The largest effect size was found between the following categories: 8,100-10,999 kunas⁷ and 16,100⁸ and more kunas as well as 12,100-14,099⁹ kunas and 16,100 and more kunas.

⁴ Very dissatisfied + somewhat dissatisfied.

⁵ Generally satisfied.

⁶ Very satisfied + extremely satisfied.

⁷ 1,070-1335 EUR.

⁸ 2,128 EUR.

⁹ 1,600-1,864 EUR.

Table 5. Statistically significant difference between the pairs

Category pairs	Effect size	
	Factor 1	Factor 2
(2600kn-4599kn) and (16100kn and more)	0.22	0.21
(4600kn-6099kn) and (12100kn-14099kn)	0.22	/
(8100 -10099) and (16100 and more)	0.32	0.26
(10100-12099) and (16100 and more)	0.29	0.20
(12100-14099) and (16100 and more)	0.32	0.18

4. Discussion

Family satisfaction subscale includes a number of various aspects such as cohesion, flexibility and family communication. Additionally, the construct is closely connected with the general life satisfaction that represents a subject of various studies and whose results are implemented in this discussion.

The first hypothesis, which claims that there is a statistically significant difference in the family satisfaction between the youth and their parents, was confirmed in the Affective aspects factor. However, statistically significant difference was found in the family satisfaction perception in regards to group affiliation (the parents vs. the youth) by using Mann-Whitney U test. Furthermore, parents express higher family satisfaction than their children (the youth). This result can be explained by the fact that the participants in this study are students of Pedagogy who are currently in the process of forming their professional identities. It can be assumed that the Pedagogy students approach the evaluation of family satisfaction more critically because they were exposed to the family life themes throughout their study. Similar results that indicate differences in the evaluation of family satisfaction between the youth and their parents can be found in the previous studies. Furthermore, Rogošić (2015) in her study concluded that the youth express higher life satisfaction when they nurture positive relationships with their parents. Additionally, by examining family satisfaction through the communication aspect, results of the previous studies indicate the existence of differences in the youth and their parents' perception where the parents express higher satisfaction with communication in the family than their children (Baxter & Pederson, 2013; Ljubetić, Reić Ercegovac & Mandarić Vukušić, 2020). We deem the presented information, which indicates that both the youth and their parents are generally satisfied with family life, to be positive, especially in the context of the fact that our study was conducted during the period of COVID 19 epidemic during which certain studies warned about the presence of certain unwanted family relationships such as difficulties in maintaining family connections and support, inadequate communication patterns, coping with stress as well as increased risk of violence and family abuse (Roje Đapić, Buljan Flander & Prijatelj, 2020).

The second hypothesis, which claims that there is a statistically significant difference in perception of family satisfaction between the youth and their parents in regards to their socio-demographic and socio-cultural characteristics, was confirmed. No statistically significant difference was found in the evaluation of family satisfaction in regards to participants' sex. Sex variable was not significant in the previous studies as well that examined the same topic, however, the authors of those studies do not offer an explanation for their conclusions (Ljubetić & Reić Ercegovac, 2010; Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003). We can assume that the differences in family satisfaction in regards to participant's sex were not found due to family satisfaction subscale's item content. However, it can be assumed that the differences in regards to sex would be found if the subscale examined either division of household chores or balancing between career and family responsibilities. Men express higher family life satisfaction in traditional families that include sexual division of labor (Nordenmark, 2017). Results of this study show that no statistically

significant difference was found in regards to participant's family satisfaction and their education. Results of a study, which examined family satisfaction from the youth's perspective, conducted by Ljubetić and Reić Ercegovac (2010) indicate that young people whose parents have lower degree of education express higher family dissatisfaction and vice versa. One of the possible reasons why no statistically significant difference was found could lie in the small number of participants in certain groups such as "only finished elementary school".

In addition, examining the connection between family satisfaction and family structure, the results of this study are in accordance with similar studies in this field. For example, results of a study conducted by Antaramin, Huebner and Valois (2008) show the presence of statistically significant difference between the family structure and family satisfaction where young people from two-parent families express higher satisfaction than young people living in one-parent or cohabitation family. Furthermore, in their study, authors Levin, Dallago and Currie (2012) concluded that family structure is connected with life satisfaction of both boys and girls, especially in the age of 13 and 15. Young people living in one-parent family express significantly higher life dissatisfaction in comparison to other family structures. According to descriptive analysis results, higher levels of dissatisfaction are present on certain subscale items from the members of one-parent families. One-parent families are often exposed to stressors which can lower family satisfaction such as family separation, conflicts between the family members as well as lower socio-economic status (Čudina-Obradović & Obradović, 2006). However, visible difference in family satisfaction in regards to family structure cannot be determined due to the small number of one-parent families in the study.

Results indicating differences in evaluation of family satisfaction in regards to total monthly family income show the presence of statistically significant difference. To exemplify, the higher the monthly family income, the higher the family satisfaction. The results are in accordance with the results of previous studies conducted by Ajduković and Rajhvan Bulat (2012). The results of their study show that high school students who evaluate financial possibilities of their families as below average, express generally lower level of family satisfaction compared to high school students who evaluate financial possibilities of their families as above average. Additionally, similar results are obtained in the study by Ljubetić and Reić Ercegovac (2010) who concluded that young people living in wealthy families score significantly higher on family relationship and parental behavior satisfaction subscale compared to financially average or poor families. Furthermore, results of the study conducted by Rogošić (2015) showed that sum of family monthly income indicates borderline, but statistically significant, contribution to life satisfaction in which higher sum of monthly family income contributes to the higher level of life satisfaction. Financial satisfaction represents a significant predictor of life satisfaction, i.e. life satisfaction increases with better financial situation (Brkljačić & Kaliterna Lipovčan, 2010; Knies, 2011). Brkljačić and Kaliterna Lipovčan (2010) emphasize that better financial situation affects life satisfaction only to a certain level after which further improvement of the situation does not affect the abovementioned satisfaction. However, it is important to highlight that the obtained results cannot be clearly interpreted as the categories within "total monthly income" variable were defined too broadly.

Lastly, by incorporating the aspects of family satisfaction into the "experiencing relationships" concepts between family members that include the ability to resolve conflicts, sharing positive experiences, the amount of time spent together as a family, family's concern for each other etc., the results of this study show highly scored items on the Family satisfaction subscale. To conclude, everything presented can be connected with results of a study conducted by Tuce and Fako (2014) that has confirmed the role of family flexibility and cohesion as well as family love and accepting as important protective factors that affect the adolescent's overall sense of life satisfaction.

5. Conclusion

The message about the importance of family as well as its leading position in the individual's development has been passed on through generations. Cohesion, togetherness, mutual trust, loyalty, support and lasting stability of mutually positive relationships represent expected characteristics of every family (even though, unfortunately, this is not always present). Despite the differences in viewpoints on family relationships, various theoretical analyses emphasize the importance of emotional dimension in parenthood, i.e. the importance of showing love and affection as well as accepting and mutual adapting to other family members. Family and its surroundings represent a discourse where both children and adolescents construct images of surrounding world, relationships within which they develop forms of social interaction. Family represents primary and realistically expected environment to encourage development, achieve satisfaction, acceptance and intimacy. During major life crises, family belonging as well as its support often play key role in one's survival. Individual's perspective of life satisfaction is one of the aspects of more successful functioning. Aims of this study were to examine the youth and their parents' perception of family satisfaction as well as analyze the differences in the mentioned perception in regards to sex and education of the participants, family structure and total family monthly income. The most significant results of the presented study state that both the youth and their parents express general family satisfaction. However, parents express higher satisfaction than the youth. Statistically significant differences in the participant's perception of satisfaction were found on family structure and total monthly family income variables. In that context, participants living in two-parent families express higher satisfaction than those living in one-parent families. Furthermore, the results show that the higher the total monthly family income, the higher the family satisfaction score.

The limitations of the study can be found in the number and the type of sample as higher number of randomly chosen participants is needed. Moreover, one limitation represents the inability to conduct multivariate statistics as the analysis' preconditions were not met. Suggestions for future research include thinking about more defined category specifications within independent variables, especially within total monthly family income variable. Lastly, the inclusion of every household member could potentially show significant results in the context of one's perception of family satisfaction.

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The authors declare no competing interests.

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