

# The Influence of Intergenerational Relationships and Authority on Family Climate Perceived by University Students

Meltem Kaplan<sup>1</sup>, Ersin Akpinar<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Abdülkadir Yüksel State Hospital, Gaziantep, Turkey (ORCID iD: 0000-0001-7031-242X)

<sup>2</sup>Çukurova University Medical Faculty Department of Family Medicine, Adana, Turkey (ORCID iD: 0000-0002-2884-4876)

Accepted 01 August 2025.

## Abstract

### Objective and Aim:

The family serves as the primary social environment in which individuals develop their attitudes, behaviors, and values. It plays a crucial role in shaping personal identity, fostering emotional well-being, and transmitting cultural and social norms across generations. The quality of intergenerational relationships and the way authority is perceived within the family can significantly influence the overall family climate, which in turn affects an individual's psychological development and social interactions. While supportive and understanding family dynamics promote positive emotional bonds, excessive authority and rigid hierarchical structures may create tension and negatively impact familial harmony. This study aims to

examine how university students perceive intergenerational relationships and authority within their families and to explore the influence of these perceptions on the family climate. By analyzing these dynamics, we seek to provide insights into how different family structures and socioeconomic factors shape students' experiences within their familial environments.

### Materials and Methods:

In this study, university students who voluntarily agreed to participate were asked to complete an online questionnaire, which took approximately 7–8 minutes. The study evaluated participants' perceptions of intergenerational relationships and authority using the Sociodemographic Information Form and the Family Climate Scale (FCS). Data analysis was performed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Mean and standard deviation values were calculated for continuous variables, while categorical variables were presented as frequencies and percentages. Comparisons between groups were conducted using independent samples t-tests and ANOVA for normally distributed variables, while non-parametric tests were applied when appropriate. A significance level of  $p < 0.05$  was considered statistically significant.

**Corresponding Author:** Ersin Akpinar  
Çukurova University Medical Faculty Department of  
Family Medicine, Adana, Turkey  
Email: akpinar@cu.edu.tr

### To cite:

Kaplan M, Akpinar E. The Influence of Intergenerational Relationships and Authority on Family Climate Perceived by University Students. VMS Journal 2025;1(1):20-27. doi: 10.64514/vmsjournal.2025.3

**Results:**

A total of 772 university students participated in the study, of whom 485 were female. The mean age of the participants was  $22.05 \pm 2.84$  years. The mean total score on the FCS was  $67.83 \pm 11.73$ . A high level of perceived intergenerational authority was identified in 58.29% of participants, which negatively influenced the family climate (mean FCS score = 66.15). Conversely, in families characterized by low perceived intergenerational authority and high intergenerational interest—defined as tolerant and understanding (16.84%)—family relationships were positively affected (mean FCS score = 77.57). No significant relationship was found between perceived intergenerational authority and age, or between the participant's or their family's place of residence ( $p > 0.05$ ). However, participants with a family income below 2020 TL, those from divorced/remarried families, and those with three or more siblings perceived intergenerational authority significantly more strongly ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:**

Understanding the dynamics of intergenerational relationships and perceptions of authority within families is crucial for fostering a supportive and harmonious family climate. Our findings suggest that excessive intergenerational authority can negatively impact family relationships, while a more tolerant and understanding family environment contributes to positive emotional and social well-being. Moreover, socioeconomic factors such as lower household income, complex family structures (e.g., divorced or remarried families), and having multiple siblings appear to be associated with a stronger perception of intergenerational authority. These insights highlight the need for family-centered interventions and policies aimed at improving communication, reducing generational conflicts, and fostering a balanced family climate that supports young adults' emotional and psychological development. Future research should

further explore the long-term effects of intergenerational authority and family climate on young adults' social adaptation, academic performance, and mental health. Additionally, targeted support programs may be beneficial in helping families cultivate healthier intergenerational relationships, ultimately promoting individual and societal well-being.

**Keywords:** Family Climate, Intergenerational Relationships, Authority

**Introduction**

The family is the school in which one learns the art of living, from child development to socialization, from education opportunities to the choice of profession, from building friendships to marriage and separation, and from the area where cultural value patterns are internalized to the area where legal structures are built (1). The family passes these on to the next generations, ensuring social continuity, and as a protector of cultural identity and values (2).

Although the family concept has gone through many structural and formal changes in history, it has preserved its importance in the 21st century, and has become a focus of discussion in the biological, psychological, sociological, economic and political fields (3). Although many definitions have been developed for the family concept, most family theoreticians define family as “sharing a household or living in collection, comprising two or more people where emotional bonds are formed, social roles and tasks are undertaken, and emotions such as love and a sense of belonging are shared (4).

The family climate has been conceptualized as the sum of shared opinions, emotions, attitudes and behaviors that characterize life in a social environment (5,6). The family plays a key role in the social and emotional development of the individual, and the interactions of family members with each other are particularly important for the development of interpersonal

communication skills, for the creation of social bonds and for the maintenance of feelings of kinship (7).

### **Intergenerational Relationships**

Intergenerational relationships are examined in two categories. Intergenerational attention refers to the actions of the older generation in caring about and supporting the areas of interest, desires, plans for the future and objectives of the younger generations. Intergenerational authority emphasizes whether important decisions in the family and family rules are made jointly or by the senior generations of the family (8).

The achieved knowledge used by the family members to spread behaviors affecting the family structure and functions and interpret the experiences are the cultural values of a given family (3). The values that influence the beliefs, emotions, opinions, attitudes and behaviors of the family are passed down from one generation to the next (3). The generations interact with each other, through which values are often passed from the senior, more experienced generation, to the younger generation. In families characterized by intergenerational authority, family functionality and social support are limited (9). As a result, it is possible to observe the effects of the perceived intergenerational relationships and authority on the health behavior of an individual.

### **University Life and the Family Factor in Adjusting to University Life**

University students struggle to find their identity, to adapt to social values while leaving behind their childhood values, to adopt a broader social and universal values system, and to achieve social maturity (10). While preparing for university, success-oriented family attitudes and other environmental factors cause problems in the individual. Those who put off resolving these problems until they reach university age often struggle to address them once they are alone in the university environment.

Furthermore, being a university student and living away from the family is a significant source of anxiety and a considerable stress factor (11).

A previous study found issues with the family to be among the most significant problems faced by university students, followed by economic problems, problems in expressing thoughts, future professional concerns and undesired education programs. The importance of questioning the family structure has been emphasized, in that family problems represent a significantly greater burden than economic problems (12). Many factors, such as the family structure, family adaptability, mutual family relationships, family functionality, the level of socioeconomic and psychological support provided by the family, and parental attitudes influence how the individual adjusts to university life. For example, overprotective families produce offspring with low self-esteem, who are extremely dependent on others, who have poor social skills, who are unable to decide for themselves and who require constant validation from others (13).

### **Aim and Type of Study**

This cross-sectional study evaluates intergenerational relationships and the intergenerational authority perceived by university students.

### **Universe and Sample Selection**

The study universe comprised students aged 18–35 years who attended classes at University. The study included young adults between the ages of 18 and 35 years, considering the fact that the experiences used by the individuals to evaluate family dynamics in young adulthood are different to those shaped by the living patterns that undergo changes due to various reasons in the middle- and late-adulthood periods. Participation in the study was voluntary, and 772 university students that completed the questionnaire were included in the study.

The study was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the Çukurova University Faculty of Medicine.

## Materials and Method

Following the granting of approval for the study, university students who agreed to participate in the study were asked to complete an online questionnaire published at [www.cukurovaile.org](http://www.cukurovaile.org), which took approximately 7–8 minutes. The participants completed the online Sociodemographic Information Questionnaire, evaluating sociodemographic characteristics, and the Family Climate Scale (FCS) questionnaire, evaluating the perceived intergenerational relationships and intergenerational authority. These online questionnaires were prepared and applied to garner such information as date of birth, gender, faculty and grade, place of residence during education, place of residence of the family, family structure, health status of parents, number of siblings, average monthly income of the family, educational level and occupation of the parents, presence of physical/mental problems, and regular drug use from the respondents.

### Family Climate Scale

The Family Climate Scale was developed originally by Björnberg and Nicholson in 2007 to evaluate the family climate and the mechanisms affected by it from a family psychology perspective (9). The validity and reliability of the Turkish version of the FCS was evaluated from a psychometric perspective by Gönül, Işık-Baş and Şahin-Acar. The original FCS is a 5-point Likert-type scale containing 48 items that is measured on six scales, including open communication, adaptability, Intergenerational Attention to Needs, Intergenerational Authority, Emotional Cohesion, and Cognitive Cohesion, while the Turkish version is a 34-item scale that is measured on three scales. The participants responded by marking one of the following answers: (1) I totally disagree, (2) I disagree, (3) Neutral, (4) I agree, (5) I totally agree. The total score was calculated,

with the maximum possible score being 100 points. Intrafamilial relationship and cognitive adaptability indicates a positive family climate, while intergenerational authority indicates a negative family climate, and points to an intrafamilial hierarchy (9).

The Intergenerational Attention to Needs scale measures whether different generations pay attention to the things happening in each other's lives within the family (9). The intergenerational authority scale measures whether decisions are taken or rules are set in the family by the senior generations, or with the participation of both the senior and junior generations in the decision-making process (9).

Intergenerational authority is measured by seven items (items 22 through 28), and cognitive cohesion by six items (items 29 through 34). A total of 11 items (1, 6, 15, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 30 and 32) are rated inversely. A high score (with the exception of the perceived intergenerational authority item) indicates that an individual is cared extremely in the area evaluated and/or experienced, and that the family climate is perceived positively. As the items enquiring intergenerational authority are rated inversely, low scores indicate a high level of perceived intergenerational authority, which is believed to have negative effects on the family climate.

### Evaluation of Data and Statistical Analysis

The study data were analyzed using an appropriate statistical analysis software package. The results are presented as frequency distribution and in contingency tables. The contingency tables, a student's t-test and an analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to evaluate the relations between variables. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant. Among the assumptions of the ANOVA, the normal distribution of the variables in the subgroups and the homogeneity of variance were examined with a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and a Levene test.

**Table 1.** Comparison of perceived intergenerational attention and authority with Sociodemographic Data

		Intergenerational attention	Intergenerational authority
Age	18-21	75,45±15,13	50,95±16,56
	22-27	76,33±13,24	51,23±15,25
	28-35	77,28±10,57	54,58±15,85
	p	0,534	0,257
Gender*	Male	75,03±14,66	49,66±15,68
	Female	76,5±13,69	52,35±16,11
	p	0,165	0,025
Faculty	Social Science Program	75,07±15,77	48,74±18,24
	Life Science Program	76,56±13,02	48,44±16,45
	Health Science Program	75,9±14,11	53,16±15,01
	p	0,681	0,001
Class	1	75,41±15,57	50,06±16,85
	2	75,47±15,05	52,43±16,45
	3	75,09±14,2	50,11±15,49
	≥4	76,81±11,89	51,61±15,07
	Postgraduate	79,36±9,54	58,25±13,49
	p	0,355	0,021
Place of residence of respondent	With family	75,38±15,33	52,86±16,83
	Dormitory	76,96±12,82	49,54±15,07
	Home alone	75,48±14,09	50,45±14,34
	With house friend	75,51±12,12	50,97±15,47
	p	0,556	0,78
Place of residence of respondent's family	Village	76,81±13,86	50,89±17,19
	Town-City	74,36±14,84	49,96±16,06
	Large city	77,17±13,31	52,59±15,69
	p	0,027	0,091
Family structure	Nuclear family	76,14±13,72	52,03±15,7
	Extended family	80,18±11,4	48,26±15,4
	Fragmented/ Reunited/ Other	63,03±17,92	46,91±20,64
	p	<0,001	0,027
Number of siblings	single child	65,42±16,67	53,25±20,97
	1	76,11±12,12	55,98±12,74
	2	77,2±14,97	54,19±16,92
	≥3	75,88±13,67	49,12±15,47
	p	0,003	<0,001
Monthly income	≤2020 TL (14)	76,69±14,77	49,54±16,21
	2020 TL-6355 TL	75,43±13,48	52,72±15,22
	≥ 6355 TL (15)	75,27±13,65	52,70±17,41
	p	0,451	0,025
<i>*Student-t test</i>			

## Results

The study universe comprised students who attended classes in the university. Participation in the study, and completing the questionnaires, were entirely voluntary. Of the 1,772 students who reviewed the

questionnaire form, 1,026 started filling them out, while 786 completed them. Of the total, six questionnaires were excluded from the study due to missing data and eight students who do not meet the age criterion (18–35 years) were excluded. Accordingly,

772 university students were included in the study.

The mean age of the participating students was  $22.05 \pm 2.84$  years (min-max= 18-35, n=772). Of the respondents, 62.8% (n=485) were female and 37.2% (n=287) were male.

Of the respondents, 51.3% (n=396) were in the transition stage to early adulthood (18-21 years), 40.6% (n=314) had an entry life structure for early adulthood, and 8.1% (n=62) were in the age 30 transition period or had culminating life structures for early adulthood.

**Table 2.** The distribution of the FCS total score and the scores perceived intergenerational attention and perceived intergenerational authority of participants

	Mean±SD	Median	Min-Max
FCS	67,83±11,73	68,4	10,29-95,59
Intergenerational attention	75,43±16,22	75	4,17-100
Intergenerational authority	51,44±15,95	50	3,57-96,43

Of the students, 48.4% were living with their families, and 49.3% of the families were living in a large city.

Of the participants, 60.1% (n=464) were studying in the Health Sciences program, 26.3% (n=203) were studying in the Life Sciences program and 13.6% (n=105) were studying in the Social Sciences program.

Of the respondents, 83.8% (n=647) had a nuclear family structure. The number of siblings was three or more in 59.2% (n=457) of the students (Table 1, Table 2).

The participants who scored below and above the mean scores for the intergenerational authority (mean score=51.44) and the intergenerational attention to needs (mean score=75.43) scales were divided, and their data was arranged on 2x2 contingency tables (Table 3). The effects on the perceived family climate were then evaluated through a comparison of the intergenerational relationships of the participants. The intergenerational authority score was high in 58.29% (n=450) of the participants, indicating a negative effect on the family climate (mean FCS score=66.15). In indulgent families (16.84%, n=130), where the perceived intergenerational authority is low and intergenerational attention is high,

family relationships are affected positively (mean FCS=130). Although a low perceived intergenerational attention to needs score affects family relationships negatively in families that are characterized as negligent (24.87%, n=192), the family climate is positively affected due to the low perceived intergenerational authority scores in these families (mean FCS score=74.09). The mean FCS score in authoritative families with low perceived intergenerational attention to needs score was 60.21. A negative family climate is perceived in this group, which accounted for 33.16% (n=256) of the participants.

## Discussion

The family structure in Turkey has evolved from the traditional family structure that prevailed in the past to today's nuclear family structure. Of the respondents in the study, 83.8% reported an nuclear family structure. The percentage of respondents that reported a fragmented or reunited family structure was 4.8%. The respondents in this group had a significantly negative perception of the family climate, had more negative intrafamilial relations, and were from families with a low level of perceived adaptability. In recent years, there has been an increase in studies evaluating the effects of family fragmentations and reunions on adolescents. Many studies have reported

**Table 3.** Intergenerational relations and perception of authority

		Intergenerational Authority			
		Low	High		
Intergenerational Attention	High		Indulgent	Over protective	High Attention
		n	130	194	324
		%	16,84	25,13	41,97
		FCS mean score	77,57	74	75,43
	Low		Negligent	Authoritative	Low Attention
		n	192	256	448
		%	24,87	33,16	58,03
		FCS mean score	74,09	60,21	61,31
			Low Authority	High Authority	Total
		n	322	450	772
		%	41,71	58,29	100
		FCS mean score	68,76	66,15	67,83

that those raised in fragmented/reunited families lack good socializing processes, which triggers various psychosocial problems, and that such individuals may experience adaptation problems later in their lives (16).

When the intergenerational relationships of the participants were evaluated, 16.84% perceived their families as democratic, sensible and tolerant, 24.87% reported their family to be negligent, and 58.29% claimed that their families were authoritative, to some degree. In a 2013 study by Karabeyeser, university students raised by parents with democratic and sensible attitudes exhibited superior personal development and had more solid life objectives than those raised in an authoritative family environment (17). Another study involving 521 university students reported significantly higher social support scores among students who perceived their parents to be sensible and democratic than those with other parenting styles (repressive, authoritative, inconsistent, overprotective). Furthermore, these students were found to have more opportunities to express their emotions and thoughts within the family, and to established confident relationships with the opposite sex, while also feeling less lonely and able to establish healthier relationships with the environment (18). The same study

found that the feelings of loneliness in university years and social support perceptions did not differ between the two genders, but were found to be linked to the perceived parental attitudes (18).

### Conclusion

Intergenerational relationships are shaped by changes in the roles of the family members, age period, advances in communication technologies, education, culture, socioeconomic factors and the acquired standard of judgement. The steady increase in the proportion of the elderly population in Turkey (8.7% as of 2018) and the resulting problems will have either favorable or unfavorable effects on intergenerational relationships (19). The presence and the levels of attention and authority between different generations in a family, the knowledge of the level of emotional and cognitive cohesion, and the observation of intrafamilial relationships through regular home visits will allow family physicians to evaluate the overall psychological climate of a family. This will allow information to be gathered on how individual families cope with challenges, along with their decision-making mechanisms and communication patterns, thus allowing the physician to apply protective, therapeutic and rehabilitating healthcare services to individuals,

effectively, and with a comprehensive and holistic approach. Family physicians can encourage individuals to strengthen the positive aspects of the family climate, to determine those that can be changed, and to provide training and consultation services to the family.

## References

1. Aktaş G. An Overview of Sociological Studies in Turkey, *Sociology Conferences*, 2015:52
2. A Study on the Evaluation of Law No. 4320 on the Protection of the Family and Its Implementation. Ankara: Republic of Turkey, Prime Ministry, General Directorate of Family and Social Research, 2008.
3. Hallaç S, Öz F. A Theoretical Perspective on the Concept of Family. *Current Approaches in Psychiatry*, 2014; 2(6):142-153.
4. Allender JA, Spradley BW. *Community Health Nursing Concepts and Practice*, 5th edition. Philadelphia, Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2005.
5. Ekvall G. Organizational climate for creativity and innovation. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 1996;5(1):105-123.
6. Niermann C, Krapf F, Renner B, Reiner M, Woll A. Family health climate scale (FHC-scale): development and validation. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 2014; 11(1):30.
7. Bowlby J. *A secure base*. New York: Basic Books, 1988.
8. Björnberg Å, Nicholson N. The family climate scales: Development of a new measure for use in family business research. *Family Business Review*, 2007;20:229-246.
9. Gönül B, Baş HI, Acar BŞ. Adaptation of the Family Climate Scale into Turkish and Its Psychometric Evaluation. *Turkish Journal of Psychological Counseling and Guidance*, 2018; 8(50):165-200.
10. Çuhadaroğlu F. Identity Confusion among University Youth. In *Scientific Studies of the Symposium on Adaptation Problems in University Youth, Psychological Counseling and Research Center*, Bilkent University, Ankara, 1989:35-41.
11. Kacur M, Atak M. Problem Areas and Coping Strategies of University Students: The Case of Erciyes University. *Journal of the Institute of Social Sciences*, Erciyes University, 2011; 1(31):273-297.
12. Bilgin M. An Examination of the Relationship Between University Students' Problems and Their Values. *Çukurova University Faculty of Education Journal*, 2001;2(20):18-25.
13. Sümer N. The Role of Parental Attitudes and Behaviors in Attachment Anxiety During Adolescence. 11th Adolescence Days, Speech Manuscript. Hacettepe University. <http://www.psy.metu.edu.tr/rrl/publications/>, 2006.
14. Republic of Turkey Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services. Minimum Wage - 2019. Access: <https://www.ailevecalisma.gov.tr/istatistikler/calisma-hayati-istatistikleri/asgari-ucret/asgari-ucret-2019/> Access date: 15.06.2019.
15. Turkish Statistical Institute. Basic Statistics: Income, Living, Consumption and Poverty. Access: <http://www.tuik.gov.tr/UstMenu.do?metod=temelist> Access date: 12.06.2019.
16. Ulusoy D, Demir NÖ, Baran AG. Broken Families and Deviant Behaviors in Adolescents: The Case of Senior High School Students. *Hacettepe University Faculty of Letters Journal*, 2005;22(2).
17. Karabeyeser M. Psychological Well-Being of University Students According to Parental Attitudes and Stressful Life Events. Unpublished Master's Thesis, Ankara: Hacettepe University;2013.
18. Çeçen AR. An Examination of Students' Levels of Loneliness and Social Support According to Their Gender and Perceptions of Parental Attitudes. *Turkish Journal of Educational Sciences*, 2008;6(3):415-431.