

# Literature Review: The Influence of the Family Environment on Moral and Cognitive Development

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## Abstract

The article mainly discusses the importance of family environment factors for children's moral cognition development. Secondly, it discusses the mutual influence between parents and children, thus changing the atmosphere of the family environment. It also discusses how positive and negative changes in the closed environment of the family during Covid-19 will affect the moral cognitive development of adolescents. Finally, the direction of future research is proposed. In future studies, the consistency or similarity of the parents' basic data should be considered to ensure that the children in the study have similar family environments and reduce the factors that will affect the data and conclusions. In conclusion, this paper confirms that the family environment is the basis for influencing children's future development. The influence between children and parents is interactive. In future research, additional longitudinal research, cross-cultural research, and research on the role of emotion in moral judgment are needed to further improve the family environment's impact on children's moral cognition development.

## 1. Introduction

The foundations for a person's moral cognitive, social, and emotional outcomes are laid from what kind of environment they are developed. Moral and cognitive development are two key aspects of human growth and development. Moral development involves acquiring values, principles, and moral reasoning, while cognitive development involves developing mental processes such as perception, attention, memory, and logic. Many factors affect moral cognition, such as family factors, environmental factors, social factors, peer behavior influence, campus education, network influence, etc. Early childhood is a critical period of life development, and the influence and activities during this period are crucial to the development and function of the brain (Yang et al., 2021). A study in economics shows that (Richter et al., 2016) If the critical period of children's development is ignored, the average income in their adulthood will drop by 26%. During the rapid development of early childhood, the brain is particularly vulnerable to external factors such as nutritional status, social factors, economic factors, family factors, parent-child relationships, and school atmosphere (Eves et al., 2020). This stimulation will directly or indirectly have a positive or negative impact on the child (Dégeilh et al., 2022). This literature review will focus on the impact of family factors, and the family environment is the first factor affecting children's moral cognition. The family environment is children's first environment when they grow up. It is extremely important in a child's moral and cognitive development. The actions and behaviors

of parents in the family can affect children's moral and cognitive development. Numerous studies have shown that family environment can play a significant role in shaping both moral and mental development in children. In the article Yang and her colleagues have summarized that the cognitive and psychomotor development of children under five years old is significantly related to the family parenting environment. Through subgroup analysis, it is concluded that the correlation between early childhood development and family-rearing environment will be stronger after 18 months than before 17 months. In addition, the correlation between family upbringing environment and cognitive development is the same in countries with different economic levels (Yang et al., 2021). This literature review will summarize the latest research on these topics and aims to assess and integrate current research on how the family environment affects moral and mental development. Moreover, provide an overview of recent research on the effects of the family environment on moral and cognitive development and suggests future research in this area. It also mentions whether family relationships in a closed environment positively or negatively affect adolescent moral cognitive development under the influence of Covid-19 Impact. Find commonalities and contrasts in results and draw attention to future research opportunities.

## 2. Family Environments Are the First Factor in Moral Cognition Development

All children who grow up in a family environment are the

first to come into contact with the educational environment and the moral environment created by their parents and other family members. The first step for children to explore the world is to learn and imitate these family members and discover the world from them. Therefore, a good and harmonious family environment and close family relationships will establish the first inherent cognition of society for children, and this cognition will largely affect the child's future development. The family most influences a child's learning and socialization, as the family is a child's main social group (All4kids, 2017). The family environment will affect children based on parental behavior, education, parent-child communication, and relationships. The relationship between parents will establish a basic social cognition of the relationship between men and women for children's cognition. The family-rearing environment includes the quality of parents, that is, the behavior and way of doing things, the basic structure of the family, the interaction mode and parent-child response between the parents, the availability of family resources, and the learning conditions that can be created (Black et al., 2017). The positive degree of communication will affect The completeness of communication skills and expression methods established by children. The structural relationship of the family, the way of raising children, and the relationship between family members are closely related to children's development (Orri et al., 2019). Parents are role models, making children imitate their behavior. At the level of family atmosphere, supporting parents and other family members to improve the quality of parenting can promote children's development potential (Britto et al., 2016). Tan & Yasin (2020) mentioned in the article that the effective educational methods that positively affect children's moral cognition are the role models from the family, communication, and the degree of contact with family members. On the contrary, when parents are busy with work and neglect to accompany their children and cannot establish a good intimate relationship with them, children will not get a positive impact on moral cognition. A study by Dalmacito (2013) showed that adolescents' moral decline is due to insufficient family participation. Children learn from and are most influenced by the people who mean the most to them, and the most meaningful adults are the people the child is emotionally attached to, usually the child's parents. If the child does not have a strong emotional attachment to the parents, the role of the parents as a moral guide will be greatly reduced, and the adult from which the child comes will act as a moral guide. Such people need to have a great sense of responsibility to be able to do so. Correctly guide the person being guided. On the other hand, children with

a strong attachment to their parents will emulate their parents' behavior, even if the parent's behavior is bad (Popenoe, 1998). This means when a family relationship is close enough, children will use their parents' behavior as a standard of judgment and learn from it to make it one of their moral standards. At this time, the parents' behavioral and moral standards will become the basis for children's moral cognitive standards.

### 3. How Parents Influence Children

The emotional relationship between parents affects infants' personal and social development to some extent. A study by Nicolaus and his colleagues in 2021 showed that fathers more satisfied with their partnership reported better personal-social development of their infants when controlling for all potential con-founders and when the paternal-infant relationship was included. A detailed analysis of paternal relationship satisfaction revealed that infants' individual social development was largely predicted by fathers' perceptions of affection and affectionate community/communication between their parents (Nicolaus et al., 2021). Changes in the family environment will affect the development of children's moral cognition. The first change in the family environment that a child encounters is the chance that the mother will suffer from postpartum depression after giving birth. Since the mother will spend much time with the child when the child is young, it will also have more influence on the child. Risks to children of untreated mothers with postpartum depression include poor cognitive functioning, behavioral inhibition, emotional dysregulation, violent behavior, externalizing disorders, and psychiatric and medical conditions in adolescence, the study said. The results come from unsystematically integrating these children's experiences from birth to adolescence (Slomian et al., 2019). Untreated mothers with postpartum depression can lead to sensitive family relationships, tension, and negative emotions (Slomian et al., 2019). Some families also have fathers suffering from postpartum depression, and about 1 in 10 fathers suffer from postpartum depression (Horsager, 2021). The first year of the newborn is a critical period for establishing a secure attachment relationship with parents, so parents with postpartum depression will lack affection for their children and show irritability, indifference, or even hostility, making it impossible to establish a strong, secure attachment relationship (Regence, 2022). Babies cannot form a secure attachment to unfriendly emotions in such an environment for a long time. Since children's initial morality is established by imitating parents or family members, it is very easy for them to replicate and use these negative emotions as the basis of their moral

cognition in such an environment.

#### **4. How Children Influence Parents**

Most studies emphasize the family environment and parental education as the most important factors affecting a child's moral cognition. However, some studies still believe that parents do not influence children in family education, but children's behavior influences parents (Maccoby, 2000). A study during the pandemic showed that some parents, especially mothers, felt stressed and out of control because of their children's behavior, which negatively affected children's moral cognitive development (Vargas Rubilar et al., 2022). Because babies need to be cared for uninterruptedly, parents will sacrifice some sleep time to care for their children. Prolonged sleep deprivation and parenting stress can lead to an increased risk of parental depression and anxiety, resulting in a low-income family atmosphere (Hogenboom, 2022). Other studies have proved that children's innate personality directly affects how parents raise them (Hogenboom, 2022). Compared with children and adults, parents are more likely to compromise with children to give up some moral behaviors, which will cause deviations in children's moral education. Because parents often spend the most time with young children over extended periods, these questions of change plasticity are important as we try to understand parental domains of influence. Nonetheless, parents are never the only source of influence for children. As children grow older, they become increasingly susceptible to influence from peers, schools, and teachers, as well as television and the Internet (Maccoby, 2000). Positive influences reduce the burden on parents and increase the intimacy and well-being of the family environment. However, wrong behaviors will add more education and guidance work for parents. Since young children cannot distinguish right from wrong, parents must spend more time correcting their children's behavior. Suppose there is no timely intervention, coupled with long-term parenting pressure. In that case, parents may have out-of-control behaviors, causing more negative impacts on their children and spending much time correcting them again, starting from this vicious circle.

#### **5. How Family Environment Changes Affected Children During Covid-19**

Many countries have adopted mandatory measures to make parents work from home during the pandemic. Students study at home, increasing the contact time between teenagers and parents and forcing the integrity of the family environment. The article examines the day-to-day influence of parents and parenting in the Netherlands during Covid-19 and the impact of parenting

on adolescents. Fears about external factors such as money and news of the lockdown caused a slight tension in family relations, but parents were more concerned with their children during the lockdown period. The influence of education and moral cognition has caused certain negative effects. However, according to the overall results, the education level and the influence of moral cognition have not completely developed negatively (Janssen et al., 2020).

Another study, Moral Development of Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic, pointed out that due to the blockade, parents can spend more time adjusting their parenting plans, from single parenting to parent co-education, and treating children with poor understanding at a slower pace. It is effective to guide children to answer questions, correct children's behavior, and guide moral cognition in a positive direction (Noveni et al., 2021). On the other hand, since parents can spend more time with their children without commuting, they are more willing to find effective and positive parenting programs to positively affect children's moral cognition.

#### **6. Conclusion**

This article confirms that the family environment impacts the development of children's moral cognition, and its influence serves as the basis for children's future development. The current research has analyzed the influence of the family environment on children's moral and cognitive development in normal society and the impact of the family environment caused by the closed environment during the Covid-19 period on children's moral cognition. The current research results show that the family environment is not the only factor that affects the parents, and children as a factor affecting the family environment will also have a certain impact on their parents and feedback on early childhood education. Last but not least, the review makes many recommendations for future research, including additional longitudinal studies, cross-cultural studies, and research on the role of emotions in moral judgment.

#### **7. Discussion**

The main purpose of studying family environment factors is to explore the direction and reasons for children's moral development. Its fundamental purpose is to prevent distortions in children's moral development in the future or intervene as early as possible to correct distorted moral cognition. Although many studies have shown the importance of parents in the family intervening in children's moral cognition development, the research still has limitations. These previous studies mainly focused on the influence of this family on children, but few studies

analyzed the gaps and limitations among the sampled families themselves. Future research on this topic needs to clarify the differences between families, the level of moral awareness and education of parents within the family, and the impact of the gap between rich and poor.

Based on the above research materials, the importance of the family environment in establishing children's initial moral cognition is clarified. The next step is to conduct in-depth research on how to influence the family to provide a good environment for children to establish positive moral cognition. In future research, it is necessary to pay attention to the reasons for the differences in educational environments in similar families, the possibility and feasibility of parents intervening or educating children to change the direction of children's moral cognition development, and whether external intervention in family education can prevent children from Distortion of moral perception moreover, whether some positive family parenting methods during Covid-19 can continue to be used after society restores order. How young children, as one of the factors influencing the family environment, can avoid negative influences.

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