

Davis Research Project

Volume 3, Issue 5

Spring 2013

A message from Su Yeong Kim, Chief Researcher

We are very pleased to have you continue with the Davis Research Project. In this issue, we highlight information on the effects of gender on family obligations over time.

Please note that the project is now housed at the University of Texas at Austin. We look forward to your continued support and participation in the project. We can be reached by e-mail at projectfamily@gmail.com, by phone at (415) 271-0390 and on the internet at <http://webspace.utexas.edu/syk343/>. When you move or when your contact information changes, please update your contact information.

Gender and its Effects on Family Obligations Over Time

Family obligations can be defined in a number of ways. Some may view it as a sense of loyalty to their family, such as treating their parents with respect. Others may view it as the amount of time an individual spends at home with their family, eating meals together, or helping one's parents financially in the future.

Using these various definitions of one's sense of obligation to the family, we asked participants 12 questions about the different ways they express their sense of family obligation. 12 questions were asked using a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "not at all important," 3 being "somewhat important," and 5 being "very important." Focusing on gender, we aimed to see if there were any differences between males' and females' sense of family obligation over time. The questions were answered by individuals as they entered three different life stages- as middle schoolers, high schoolers, and emerging adults. This was done to focus on how the participants' sense of family obligation changed over time.

Focusing on gender differences at time 1, middle school, a significant difference in family obligations between boys and girls was not discovered.



Gender and Its Effects on Family Obligations Over Time

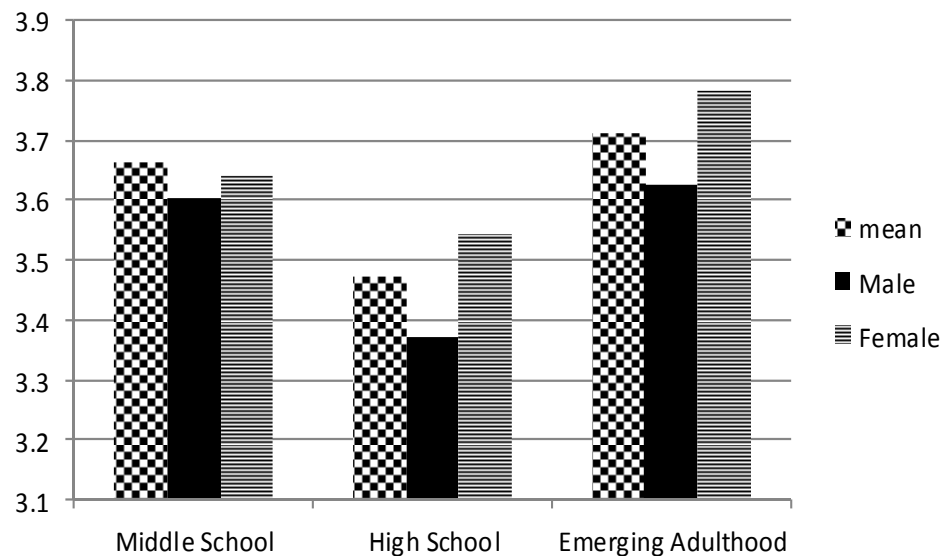
However, at times 2 and 3, high school and emerging adulthood respectively, a significant gender difference was found. During high school and emerging adulthood, females reported significantly higher levels of family obligation than their male counterparts. As shown in the figure, high school males' family obligation mean score was 3.37 while females' mean score was 3.54. Males and females once again re-

ported significant differences in family obligations at the emerging adulthood life stage. Males' family obligation mean was 3.63, while females' family obligation mean was 3.78. The gender difference between the males and females in high school and emerging adulthood are significantly different, with females having more family obligations at both points. It is also important to note that participants reported lower amounts of

obligation toward their family during high school than at any other time. Comparing the responses from the participants when they were in middle school and emerging adulthood with the responses they provided in high school, there is a significant difference in the overall level of family obligation the individual senses at these different life stages.

During middle school, the sense of family obligations in participants was about 3.6, while in high school, this significantly drops to 3.4. Finally, in emerging adulthood, the participants' sense of family obligation returns to levels just above those reported previously in middle school to about 3.7. The sense of family obligation reported in middle school and emerging adulthood is not significantly different.

As shown in the figure, of the three time periods surveyed, it is during high school that students sense less family obligations than any other recorded time in the project. One can assume that the lower amounts of family obligations in high school can be attributed to a new sense of independence and the pursuit of autonomy that are characteristics of this life stage. For this reason, it can be challenging for parents when trying to maintain family obligations previously instilled in



their children during high school. In summary, there are two major findings for gender and its effects on family obligations over time. The first major finding is that gender differences concerning a sense of family obligation are not significant in middle school, but are in high school and emerging adulthood. Reasons for this could be newfound maturity and responsibilities associated with later life stages,

which may consequently heighten gender role formations within the household. The second major finding is that the overall sense of obligation one feels toward the family dropped significantly in high school, suggesting that an individual's sense of family obligation is not stable, but changes over time. Thus, high school may be the most important stage for parents to instill a strong sense of family obligation in their children.