



RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Family Functionality and Life Skills, a Comparative Study between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Families in the Department Of Cesar

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**ABSTRACT**

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The role of families in society has always been paramount in the integral development of its members regardless of their ethnic group. The objective of this research is to compare family functionality and life skills in indigenous and non-indigenous populations in the department of Cesar. For this purpose, cross-sectional quantitative research with a descriptive-comparative approach was carried out. We used non-probabilistic cluster sampling and worked with first source data through the family APGAR and the life skills survey. The results indicate that assertive and effective communication and stress management are the skills least developed by adolescents, and it was also found that 23% have families with severe family dysfunction. It is concluded that stress management is the only life skill with significant differences in favour of indigenous people and the same as the average family functionality.

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## INTRODUCTION

The family and its structure have historically been the subject of study due to its importance as an institution in all fields and branches of science (Diaz et al., 2020), recognising the direct or indirect effects of the family and its social dynamics from different categories such as cohesion, affection, permeability, adaptability and harmony which influence social skills, the acquisition of identity and the role exercised at community level (Velis et al., 2020).

From the perspective of psychology, understanding family functioning and the responsibility of providing care for others is of enormous relevance; according to Acevedo and Vidal (2019) the family can be considered as an organisationally open system, which is separated from the outside world by borders and structurally consists of delimited subsystems with different degrees of permeability and with different forms of internal hierarchy, i.e. the members of the family system organise and regulate their interactions through communication processes that define interactions characterised by holistic or non-additive circular patterns and the principle of equality (Chávez and Vines, 2019). For Carrasco et al., (2020) the family system maintains its organisation by changing its structure through a series of evolutionary stages. Therefore, the family is understood as a social system defined by kinship networks, spatial location and family activities based on marriage, where children complement the family unit (Mellardi, 2028).

The family plays an essential role in the development of life skills by providing role models, emotional support, opportunities for communication and socialisation, establishment of routines, educational support and transmission of values (Andrade et al., 2019). These experiences in the family environment lay the foundation for individuals to acquire the necessary skills to face challenges and thrive in different aspects of life.

The research interest in carrying out a comparative study in relation to the family functionality of indigenous and non-indigenous families, taking into account the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index in Latin American countries, is associated with the great differences between indigenous peoples and other populations (Funes et al., 2028). In particular, the high illiteracy and low educational level of the indigenous population, especially women, the limited or no access to health services, chronic malnutrition in childhood in children aged 3 to 5 years old are indicators of quality of life that could be more devastating if it were not for the forms of organisation and the role of the family among indigenous peoples (Mora et al., 2021). In ethnic cultures and societies, family, community and environment are closely linked because they generate reciprocity, cooperation and kinship due to the system of human relations unique to indigenous societies (Varese, 2021, Sánchez et al., 2022).

The indigenous communities are represented by the authorities of the *cabildo*, the head of the nucleus, indigenous teachers, parents and young people, considering the knowledge, skills and powers that resignify the value of each of them from and with the ethnic group (Simbaña and Yantalema, 2018).

The indigenous family system not only sustains the economic and political organisation of ethnic groups, but also generates affiliations, ties and affectivities that contribute to defining valid meanings for the shaping of identity even outside the contexts of indigenous organisation (O'Neill et al., 2018), given that one of the characteristics of indigenous peoples is to have inherited the culture and ancestral knowledge of their ancestors, who instilled in them a spirit of hard work and reciprocity, carrying out extraordinary cultural undertakings, such as the construction of terraces for the care of nature, the management and management of water, the construction of roads to articulate the backpacks, hamlets and their costumes, in order to carry out commercial exchanges of goods and services (Sánchez et al., 2022).

Among many of the aspects that manage to strengthen family functionality, it can be highlighted that in each of the *cabildos* there are regulations or cultural actions that for people outside their ethnic group may represent discriminatory acts towards women at all stages of their life cycle, showing low chances of receiving academic training and a high probability of being married at a very young age to older people and being mothers even when they are very young, in addition, children influenced by the role of their father in the home imitate (Guido et al., 2020), especially adolescents repeat risky behaviours that show the rigidity of the culture and its influence on the development of their personality (Valle, 2018).

It is essential to take into account the difference between indigenous and non-indigenous families in order to promote cultural diversity, respect traditional rights and knowledge, avoid discrimination and build inclusive and equitable societies. Recognising and valuing the particularities of each family group contributes to strengthening our communities and enriching our societies as a whole (Sánchez et al., 2022). Adolescents are in an emerging stage that requires a lot of accompaniment to be able to serve and play a productive role in society, and it is in this life cycle where the family is fundamental to develop life skills that respond to the needs of their environments while respecting differences and social and cultural contexts.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study was carried out using a quantitative methodology, which allowed the behaviour of the variables to be analysed, taking into account the results of the application of psychometric instruments. In addition, its design was considered a cross-sectional study, as the measurement instruments were applied at a single moment in time in the institutions where the adolescents were found, and the scope of the study was also

established as comparative, as the objective was to compare the results obtained in terms of family functionality and life skills in indigenous and non-indigenous adolescents.

## Population

For this research, the population consisted of indigenous and non-indigenous students from the Municipality of Valledupar. A non-probabilistic sampling by clusters was carried out, with the participation of 494 participants distributed as shown in table 1.

**Table 1. Distribution of participants by educational institutions**

Institution	Número de participantes
Alfonso López	235
The Hope	24
Windsor	69
San Fernando	32
San Isidro Labrador	78
Agricultural Educational Institution La Mina	56

Source: Own elaboration

Of this population, 75% were located in the urban area and 25% in the rural area. 71% did not belong to indigenous groups and 29% did. Similarly, 44% were female and 56% male. The age range was between 12 and 20 years with an average age of 15 years and 3 months.

## Instruments

In this research we worked with first source information through the application of measurement instruments such as the family APGAR whose objective was to collect information to determine family functionality in the families of adolescents with a five-point Likert scale. For the collection of information on life skills, the Díaz et al. (2013) instrument was used, which has 80 items that are measured on a Likert scale; this instrument measures 10 dimensions that are self-awareness, empathy, effective and assertive communication, interpersonal relationships, decision-making, problem solving and conflict resolution, creative thinking, critical thinking, management of feelings and emotions, and management of tension and stress. Finally, a characterisation sheet to collect socio-demographic information about the adolescents.

## Procedure

For the implementation of the project, different phases were developed and are presented in Figure 1.



## Figure 1. phases of the research project

Source: Own elaboration

### Ethical considerations

In order to carry out this research, we complied with the provisions of Resolution 8430 of 1993, which establishes the guarantees that must be taken into account when carrying out research with human beings, and also complied with the provisions of Law 1090 of 2006, which refers to research processes. This research guarantees the reliability of the information, voluntary withdrawal and all the rights of the participants.

### Data analysis

An inferential statistical analysis was carried out for the comparison of measures of the scores of the variables family functioning and life skills between the group of persons belonging to indigenous ethnicity and persons without indigenous ethnicity; for this purpose, a normality test was first carried out using the Shapiro-Wilk test, as well as the Brown-Forsythe test of equality of variances, to determine whether parametric or non-parametric tests would be used. Since there was an abnormality in the distribution in all variable measurements, the Mann-Whitney U test was used, which is a non-parametric variant of the t-test for unrelated samples that relies on average ranges to make a comparison of the same measure in two different groups (Serna et al., 2017).

### RESULTS

The main results of this research are presented taking into account the discrimination by indigenous and non-indigenous population. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the indigenous groups according to their ethnic group. 89% of the indigenous people are Kankuamos, which is consistent with the location of the educational institutions addressed.

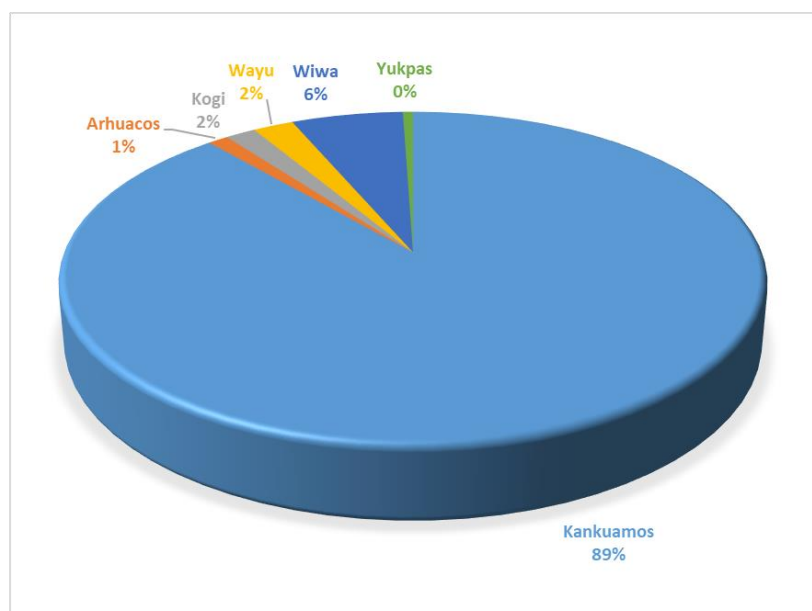
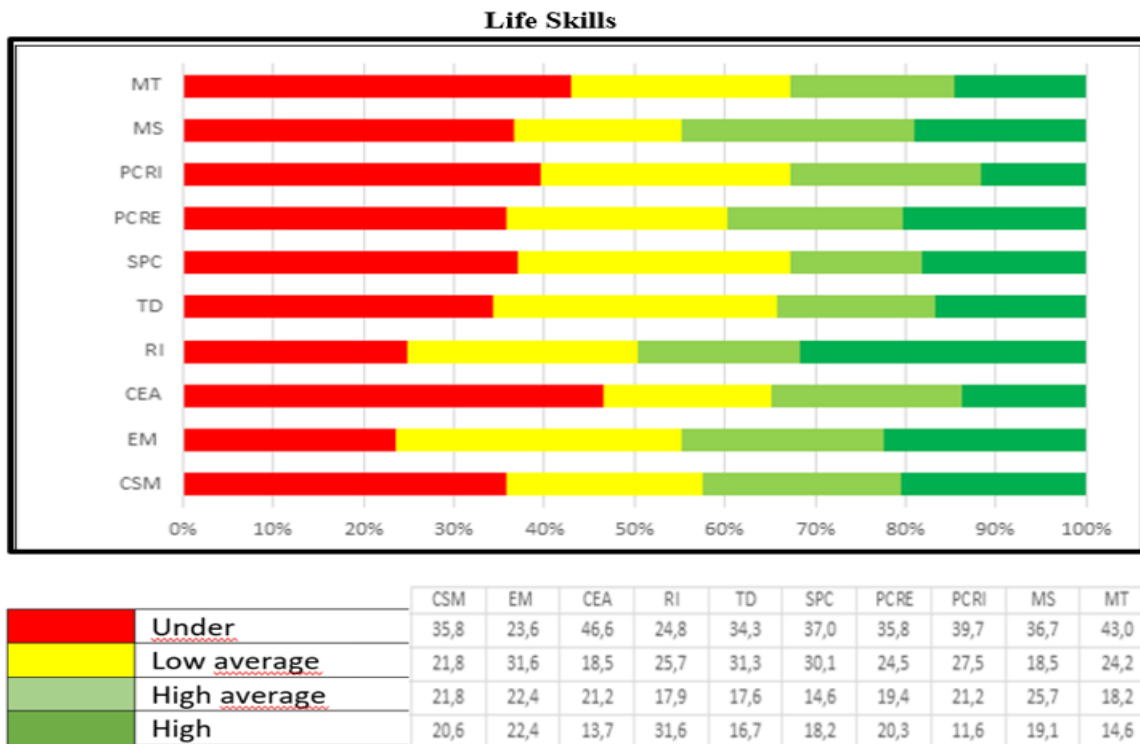


Figure 2. distribution of indigenous peoples

Source: Own research data

Figure 3 shows the distribution of participants according to the level within each of the Life Skills dimensions. The skill with the highest percentage of people at the lowest level was Effective and Assertive

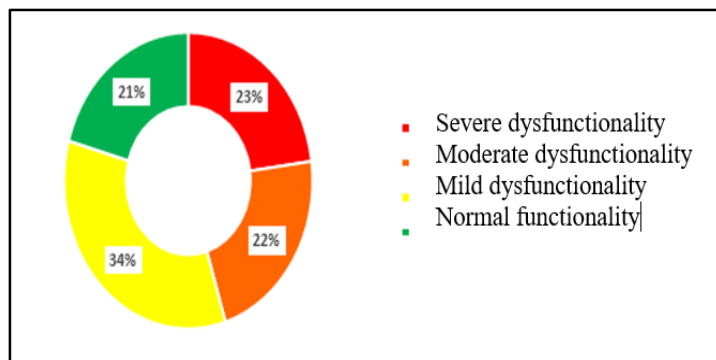
Communication with 46.6%, followed by Stress Management with 43%, Critical Thinking with 39.7%, Problem Solving and Conflict Resolution with 37%, Emotion Management with 36.7%, Self Awareness and Creative Thinking with 35.8%, as well as Decision Making with 34.3%; the skills with the fewest people at the lowest level were Interpersonal Relations with 24.8% and Empathy with 23.6%. It stands out that in no case did the high level exceed 31.6%, which was the percentage in Interpersonal Relationships, in addition to the fact that only three other skills were above 20% (Empathy, Self-awareness and Creative Thinking).



**Figure 3. Percentage distribution by Life Skills Levels**

Note: CSM: Self-awareness, EM: Empathy, CEA: Effective and Assertive Communication, IR: Interpersonal Relationships, TD: Decision Making, SPC: Problem Solving and Conflict Resolution, PCRE: Creative Thinking, PCRI: Critical Thinking, MS: Managing Feelings and MT: Managing Tensions.

On the other hand, Figure 4 shows the results of the level of family functionality. It stands out that 23% of participants report severe dysfunctionality, 22% report moderate dysfunctionality, 34% report mild dysfunctionality and only 21% report normal functionality. *Gráfica 3. Distribución porcentual según la Funcionalidad familiar*



**Figure 4. family functionality**

**Source: Own elaboration**

On the other hand, Table 1 shows the comparison between the groups of participants belonging and not belonging to an indigenous community. No significant difference was found in the life skills of Self-awareness, Effective and Assertive Communication, and Creative Thinking. In Empathy, Interpersonal Relationships, Decision Making, Problem Solving, Critical Thinking and Emotion Management there was a significant difference as the p-values were  $<.05$ , but, in addition, in all these dimensions the group of non-indigenous participants had higher average scores on the measures. The only life skills dimension in which there was a significant difference in favour of the indigenous participants was in Stress Management, where the p-value  $<.05$  and the mean was higher in that group compared to the non-indigenous. Finally, with regard to the other variable, Family Functionality, it is evident that there is also a statistically significant difference as the p-value  $<.05$ ; the mean of family functionality was higher for the group of indigenous participants.

**Table 1. Comparison of measures in the dimensions of life skills and family functioning between indigenous and non-indigenous groups of persons**

Comparative variables	Indigenous ethnicity	N	Mean	SD	W	p	CRB
Self-awareness	Non-indigenous	312	28.365	5.036	25992.5	.063	-.099
	If indigenous	185	29.249	4.690			
Empathy	Non-indigenous	312	29.788	4.617	36872.5	$<.001$	.278
	If indigenous	185	27.497	4.745			
Effective and Assertive Communication	Non-indigenous	312	25.933	4.359	29045.0	.905	.006
	If indigenous	185	25.816	4.209			
Interpersonal Relations	Non-indigenous	312	31.288	4.286	33464.0	.003	.160
	If indigenous	185	29.768	5.156			
Decision-making	Non-indigenous	312	28.349	4.374	34528.5	$<.001$	.196
	If indigenous	185	26.708	4.272			
Problem Solving and Conflict Resolution	Non-indigenous	312	27.016	4.063	36358.5	$<.001$	.260
	If indigenous	185	25.259	4.096			
Creative Thinking	Non-indigenous	312	28.343	5.080	29693.0	.590	.029
	If indigenous	185	28.130	5.576			
Critical Thinking	Non-indigenous	312	27.792	4.816	34633.5	$<.001$	.200
	If indigenous	185	26.141	4.842			
Sentiment Management	Non-indigenous	312	26.567	5.365	35432.0	$<.001$	.228
	If indigenous	185	24.611	5.497			

Comparative variables	Indigenous ethnicity	N	Mean	SD	W	p	CRB
Stress Management	Non-indigenous	312	25.667	5.060	24847.0	.009	-.139
	If indigenous	185	26.659	4.652			
Family Functionality	Non-indigenous	312	13.484	5.246	25026.5	.013	-.133
	If indigenous	185	14.773	4.538			

Note: CRB: Biserial rank correlation. All comparison tests were done with Mann-Whitney U, because while the test for equality of variances showed  $p$ -values  $>.05$ , in the case of the SW normality test  $p$ -values  $<.05$  in one or both groups for each of the variables.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Contrasting the family functionality and life skills of indigenous and non-ethnic adolescents implies establishing geographical and cultural differences between the two groups of participants, but also bearing in mind the impact of behavioural models from the urban context that reach indigenous territory through the media and the increasingly constant interaction between cultures. This study shows that the highest percentage of indigenous adolescents belong to the Kankuama ethnic group, who cohabit the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in northern Colombia with other ethnic groups such as the Kogui, Arhuakos and Wiwa, with whom they share their ancestral history and worldview. The Kankuamos constitute 0.91% of Colombia's indigenous peoples, 19.87% of whom live in urban areas, a figure that is lower than the national average of ethnic groups living in cities with 21.43% (ONIG, n.d.). Lo anterior implica que la mayoría de las familias Kankuamas siguen habitando el contexto rural de la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, donde tratan de conservar su lengua autóctona, creencias espirituales, tradiciones como los pagamentos, identificación de lugares sagrados, ofrendas, música tradicional de Gaita y Chicote; como fuente económica se centran en la agricultura y las artesanías donde principalmente las mujeres se dedican desde muy niñas a tejer mochilas (ONIG, s.f.)

This dynamic and the intention to preserve traditions in the context of indigenous families highlights that in the results of this study the average family functionality was higher for ethnic families compared to urban households. This is in contrast to the results presented by Cortes (2014) in a comparative study between indigenous and non-indigenous families where the phenomenon of pregnant adolescents is presented and where it is hypothesised that the level of functionality or dysfunction influences the presentation of early pregnancy, but whose findings show that there are no marked differences in the family functionality of the households compared and therefore, this risk behaviour in adolescents would be more associated with their life skills than with family dynamics.

It is worth noting that the life skills that adolescents develop are rooted in the upbringing patterns that are taught in the family environment and that are manifested during adolescence when psychosocial risk factors become present in the life project of young people, according to the Organisation of Ibero-American States (OIE, 2018) cited in (Fernandez, 2022), the care practices of indigenous families emphasise strengthening the qualities, skills and abilities of children and adolescents from their indigenous cultural perspective. Even so, this study shows that in relation to life skills, both indigenous and non-indigenous youth have low levels of assertive communication and a significant difference in the ability to manage tensions in favour of adolescents from ethnic communities.

Previous studies such as those conducted by Inga et al., (2022) point out that precisely young people from urban social contexts tend to develop social skills at a medium-low level without this being linked or associated to the functionality of their families. Risk behaviours such as alcohol consumption and internet abuse seen as stressful events in the life of non-indigenous adolescents are also more frequent in adolescent

girls with dysfunctional families (Cortaza-Ramírez et al., 2019), as well as in Trujillo-Guerrero et al, (2016) in their studies with adolescents from urban families managed to demonstrate that the young person lacks skills to cope with risks such as alcohol consumption and that there is a significant correlation between the negative perception of family functionality and this behaviour of the adolescent that involves stress management and decision-making as fundamental skills in their life project.

Finally, it is concluded that there is still minimal functionality in the indigenous family in contrast to the families of young people who develop in the urban area, which confirms that single-parent family typologies, non-integrated nuclei and families living in economically vulnerable conditions are the most at risk of family dysfunctionality (Ordóñez et al., 2020). ) and in relation to life skills, these are developed by adolescents based on the upbringing patterns of their caregivers, the environment where they develop and the characteristics of their own personality where the innate and the learned influence, indigenous families assume the life plan of their children based on their worldview, their culture and political perspective and being transmitted from generation to generation through oral narration, thus seeking to preserve their family organisation (Bolívar and Moya, 2016 cited in Fernandez, 2022).

### Authors' Contributions

MP conceived the idea, designed the project and wrote the manuscript. JC participated in the design of the study and helped in writing the manuscript. J helped with the discussion and conclusions. LK and H helped in statistical analysis. MM helped with the Population. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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