

ABSTRACT

The objective of this research was to investigate environmental factors operating within the Jamaican context which appear to have influenced the character development of a sample of older adolescents. Seventeen components of character were identified from the literature, and an instrument developed to tap these dimensions. Data obtained from a sample of 234 Sixth formers were subjected to relevant statistical procedures (factor analysis, item-to-scale and coefficient alpha techniques). This resulted eventually in the production of a 34-item scale for which claims of reliability ($r = 0.8421$) and validity were made.

Six independent variables tapping environmental inputs were identified (Life Style, Influence of Family/Home, Religion, the Media, School and Peer Group) and measures of these, together with the character scale, were administered to 150 Sixth formers. The "t" statistic revealed significant differences between males and females on certain dimensions: while females scored significantly higher on Life Style, the situation was reversed on Character and Influence of School in favour of males. Stepwise multiple regressions identified Religion as the best predictor of Character for the sample overall, with Influence of Family/Home emerging as the second strongest. Regressions were not significant for the male subsample, but for females, Religion, School and Family/Home Influences proved highly significant predictors of Character. Stepwise discriminant function analysis techniques mounted on a sex basis, discriminated best for females, in that 66 percent were correctly classified when Character and Religious Influences were entered as independent variables. In the case of males, 50 percent were correctly classified through this process.

In view of the obvious influence of certain environmental variables (Religion and Family/Home Influences) on character development, especially for girls, it was recommended that all sectors of society be sensitized to the important role they play in influencing the moral and ethical behaviour of young people.