Structural Analysis of Family Dynamics Across Family Life Cycle in Iran

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to analysis the family dynamics structure within family systems in Iran. Indeed this research will evaluate four main dimensions (cohesion, flexibility, family communication and family satisfaction) of family dynamic structures in each stage of family life cycle among Iranian families. The research questions and hypotheses will be focused on exploring and understanding of the family dynamic structures among the participations. The mixed-method approach will be used in this research. It is hoped that the results will indicate the new concept of family dynamic models. Also it can be a reference to family counsellors in Iran. By doing so, this research will create contribution in the development of family counselling.

Keywords: Family Dynamics, Family Life Cycle, Couples;

1. Introduction

Several studies suggested that the healthy family protect well-being by providing emotional support and companionship (Ross, Mirowsky, & Goldsteen, 1990). Other than that, healthy family also brings positive correlation to economic security, psychological well-being and physical health (Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996) and child development (Walsh, 2003). In addition families with positive dynamics more likely lead to avoid of risky behaviours, such as heavy drinking, addiction and violence (Umberson, Crosnoe, & Reczek, 2010). On the other hand, in recent years, family professionals reported that number of clients with family problems has been increasing than in the past (Benton, Robertson, Tseng, Newton, & Benton, 2003). The most of couples that come for family counselling often complain of poor relationship with each other (Okun & Kantrowitz, 2007). Usually these clients are imbalanced in the main dimensions of family dynamics, thus they do not have a successful function in the family. Since the family systems are dynamic, so continuity dynamical system helps symptomatic behaviours. In most cases, couples or families face many crisis and stresses in their life cycle that may lead to the imbalance of their relationship with others. Based on some models of family dynamics, changes in family types can be occurred over time. Therefore, it is essential that some changes occur in patterns of family interaction before the symptoms appear for presenting the problems (Olson & Defrain, 2001). The several researchers suggested that improvement of intervention methods in family patterns is necessary (Kitzmann, Dalton III, & Buscemi, 2008). These methods can bring benefits for family interaction, and it improves the well-being of all family members.
(Proulx & Snyder, 2009). One of the intervention models in a family that provides a conceptual framework of family dynamics is Circumplex Model. This model risen from a conceptual clustering of over fifty concepts developed that to describe marital and family dynamics (Olsen et al., 1983; Olson & Gorall, 2003). Although this model is rather new, but it was supported by over 1,200 studies conducted over the last 30 years (Olson, 2011; Olson & Gorall, 2003). Circumplex Model is defined by Olson and DeFrain (2003) as “a graphic representation of dynamic relationships within families”.

This model emphasis on the interconnection of family members and their behaviours quality. Generally, Circumplex Model of marital and family systems was developed in an attempt to bridge the gap that typically exists between research, theory and practice (Olson, 1999). Circumplex Model is divided into three dimensions including cohesion as being togetherness, flexibility as the potential to deal with variations, and communication. The last dimension, which is communication, facilitates the movement in a family between the extents of the other two dimensions. Therefore, if a couple or a family has good communication skills, they are more likely to be closeness (cohesion dimension) and to be able to work out problems (flexibility dimension) when they arise (Olson & Gorall, 2003). Midrange or balanced cohesion levels represent a healthy sense of both separateness and connectedness in family relationships. Extremely low or high levels lead to disengagement (too little closeness) or enmeshment (too much closeness) (Olson, 1996; Olson, 2000). In addition, balanced flexibility levels also show a healthy of structural and flexible relationships in family. Low or high extremes can lead to rigidity (too little change) or chaotic (too much change). It seems that one of the barriers in the effectiveness of family counselling and family therapy used models and evaluates techniques of family dynamics and function systems that are inappropriate with clients’ culture. This is a gap that addresses in some literature reviews (Collins, Arthur, & Wong-Wylie, 2010; Sue & Sue, 2008). Since cultural values are unique in every society and this values and ethnicity have big influence on how a family functions. Therefore it is essential to consider cultural factors for assessment of family dynamics and their function patterns (Sue & Sue, 2008). The results are to help for deeper understanding of Iranian family dynamics structures. The literature review for this research did not identify any systematic studies in which will be analyzed on the structures of family dynamics based on Circumplex Model in each stages of family life cycle among Iranian couples. This research will be addressed a gap in the literature by investigating the hypothesis.

2. Objective of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To analyse the family dynamics structure (based on FACE IV) in formation stage, expansion stage (childbearing and preschool children, families with school-age children, families with teenagers), contraction stage, and post parental stage.

2. To compare the levels of cohesion, flexibility, total Circumplex ratio, family communication, and family satisfaction in different stages of family life cycle.

3. To display of six family types profile (balanced, rigidly cohesive, midrange, flexibly unbalanced, chaotically unbalanced, and unbalanced) in Iranian couples across on four stages of family life cycle.

4. To develop the family dynamic models in Iran.

3. Research Hypothesis

The following research hypotheses will be investigated in relation to the purpose of the study:

1. There is a difference between the cohesion ratios in different stages of family life cycle among Iranian couple.
2. There is a difference between the flexibility ratios in different stages of family life cycle among Iranian married couples.

3. There are differences between the total Circumplex ratios in different stages of family life cycle among Iranian married couples.

4. There are differences between family communications in different stages of family life cycle among Iranian married couples.

5. There are differences between family satisfactions in different stages of family life cycle among Iranian married couples.

4. Conceptual Framework

This research with clear and testable hypotheses is an attempt to integrate some levels of theory, research, and practice in the field of family science. This study draws on family systems theory, which emphasizes on the interaction between family members as a system. This theory has been focused to roles, structures, communication patterns, power relations, and boundaries in the family (Rothbaum, Rosen, Ujiie, & Uchida, 2002). The second important theory in this research is family development theory for explaining of family dynamic nature, patterned change, and changing in the family life cycle (Bitter, 2009).

The researchers based on the main variables in this research have designed a conceptual framework for more explanation of variables. Family dynamic patterns will be evaluated by Circumplex Model of marital and family system in this research. Based on this model, two main dimensions (cohesion and flexibility), family communication and family satisfaction represent the family functioning. Since the dynamical structures of couples and families may change in the face with new situations and stresses that caused by different stages of family life cycle, therefore the study of the key role of family life cycle and its impact on family dynamics is necessary.
5. Procedure

The researchers will randomly select the couples (females and males) who are living together at least six months in each stage of family life cycle (formation stage, expansion stage, contraction stage, and post parental stage) at Tehran as a capital of Iran. The age of respondents will be between 20-70 years old. The data will be collected via both questionnaire and interview as mixed method design.

6. Research Methodology

The sequential explanatory mixed method will be used in this research. This mixed-method study attempts for more understanding of family dynamic structures in different stages of the life cycle. Survey questionnaire and semi-structured interview will be employed for data collection. The questionnaire includes two parts. The first part of the questionnaire contains demographics questions that will be used to gather a description of the sample. The second part includes Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES IV Package) based on Circumplex Model. FACES IV will be evaluated on the cohesion, flexibility, family communication and family satisfaction. The researcher will use AMOS software for present causal relationships among the latent variables and SPSS software for analyzing subgroups. Finally, the researchers are expected to draw the family dynamic map based on Circumplex Model. The findings can be helped to greater understanding and more information about the family dynamics (e.g., cohesion, flexibility, communication, satisfaction) across the family life cycle among Iranian families.

7. Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, the lack of systematic studies in efficiency of family dynamics Models (such as Circumplex Model) and their influence on family functioning in Iranian culture are the barriers to apply this model in counselling and therapist planes. It seems that the results of this research will reveal more details on family dynamics across the family life cycle. The research objectives, questions and hypotheses of this study will be developed to focus on exploring and understanding of family dynamic structures in Iran.

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References


