

# Human Behaviors in Promoting Balance of Family according to Buddhist Psychology \*



<sup>1</sup>Sanu Mahatthanadull and Sarita Mahatthanadull

International Buddhist Studies College,  
Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand.

<sup>1</sup>Corresponding Author. Email: [petchsanu@gmail.com](mailto:petchsanu@gmail.com)

## Abstract

This paper presents the qualitative research which consists of two objectives, namely:- 1) To examine the concept of balance of family in Buddhism and the theory of family behavior in Psychology, and 2) To suggest human behaviors in promoting balance of Family according to Buddhist Psychology. The data were collected and analyzed together with the in-depth interviews were carried out with 7 key-informants.

The findings show balance of family implies a group of persons who live together in relationships consisting either of spouse or parents and child. Family members adopt a similar pattern of Buddhist virtuous behavior existing in equal and mutually beneficial amounts that result in a happy, good and balance relationship. Firstly, a Spouse family without children both needs to have (1) qualities of the virtues for the laity (*gharavāsadhama*), (2) equitable (*samajīvidhamma*), (3) endowing with self-responsibilities as suggested in the *Sīgālovāda Sutta*, as well as (4) living together as deity spouse instead of ghost. Secondly, Parents and Children should reciprocally share the common Buddhist practices, such as (1) filial piety (*kataññūkataveditā*), and (2) self-responsibilities as in *Sīgālovāda Sutta*. However, the theories in psychology described relationships, beliefs, behaviors and equilibrium of the family. In addition, the fivefold supportive behavior is a key to promote the sustainable balance of family according to Buddhist Psychology. They are: Emotional, Esteem, Social Network, Tangible, and Informational support.

**Keywords:** Balance of Family; Buddhist Psychology; Human Behaviors; Promoting

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## Introduction

Family is the basic building block of the society. If one tiny element is destroyed, our society will collapse as well. Thus, to strengthen the society, family institutions must be reinforced to become balanced. However, there has been a substantial body of evidence showing multitude imbalanced issues pertaining to members in family's structure and its associated problems, e.g., domestic violence, stealing behavior among family members, extramarital affair, deception between family members, substance abuse leading to addiction of alcohol and drugs, etc. These undesirable conflicts can effectively easily diminish the sanctity of marriage life. They eventually turn a perfect balanced family life to separation and divorce affecting the children to become much worse.

Therefore, in order to eradicate such problems, the balance of family should be a precedent matter to study. The term "Balance" derived from a Pāli word "*samatā*" (Vin I.183; A III.375) which literally means equality, evenness or normal state (Davids, 1925). The term is usually translated in English as "balance" (Collin, 2007; Melino, 2010) or "equilibrium" (Parsons, 1991; Prigogine, 1984; Capra, 1988; Rogers, 2011a; Rogers, 2011b). It is clearly seen that the broad meanings cover various fields of extent, e.g., balance of payments in financial account, mathematical balance in statistics, human body's system balanced as Homeostasis theory in medical sciences, etc. Despite in the Socio-Family context, "balance" connotes a state of wellness of holistic health in which each interrelated members of the family mutually interact to each other in a perfect relationship to create a good living. The balance thus plays a vital role to the norm of living system of family members in social context.

In the light of Behavioral Psychology "behavior" signifies all of activities that living organism exhibits (Matsumoto, 2009). That is all the phenomenal activities or interacts occurred among members in the family, either negative or positive. The research on marriage in the new millennium has shifted to a focus on the impact of positive behaviors on marital outcomes (Fincham, 2010). This is due to the fact that positive behaviors are desirable phenomena common to every single marriage life as "idealistic family". Despite positive behaviors appearing in real life infrequently, the study indicates the change in negative behavior over the first year of marriage predicted later marital satisfaction levels and marital status (Sullivan, 2010). Moreover, there has been an emerging literature that has

yielded consistent evidence for the importance of spousal support as a factor in relationship satisfaction (Lawrence et al., 2008) especially intensely positive emotional exchanges contribute to relationship survival” (Cutrona, 1996). More specifically, supportive behaviors can promote a positive emotional tone in the relationship and “prevent the gradual acceleration of negative interactions that often precedes divorce” (Cutrona, 1996). As a result, all of the imbalanced problems that have been occurred in the family institutions should be completely resolved in particularly reconsideration with an analytical thinking. By integrating Behavioral Psychology to the pivotal Buddhist doctrinal principle, perfect balance of family could be attained undoubtedly.

From the above statements, the researcher team is particularly interested in studying “Human Behaviors in Promoting Balance of Family according to Buddhist Psychology” in order to examine the principle of behavior and balance of family that appeared both in Buddhism and Psychology for promoting sustainable balance towards life and family of the world.

### **Objectives of the Research**

1. To examine the concept of balance of family in Buddhism and the theory of family behavior in Psychology,
2. To suggest human behaviors in promoting balance of Family according to Buddhist Psychology.

### **Research Methodology**

This is a qualitative research. In doing the Research, there are stages in the research process conducted altogether respectively. The following six steps outline a summary of steps in the whole research process:

1. Outline construction which signifies constructing the overall outline of the work in all related dimensions corresponding to the objectives. Then the problem discussion, among the research team led by the research adviser, is made by discussing the problems encountered according to the significance of the studies.
2. Data collection is preparation of data to be used in the research by gathering all useful data and information from various sources.

3. Examining the concept of balance of family in Buddhism, together with the theory of family behavior in Psychology.

4. Analytical studies together with synthesis and interpretation. They will be carried out carefully in accordance with the body of knowledge obtained in the previous step.

5. An analysis on such issue is to be carefully made using underlined Buddhist concepts and Psychology theories, together with information obtained from the in-depth interviews with 7 key informants which the interview forms were IOC evaluated by the 3 examiners:- (1) Most Venerable Prof. Dr. Phra Rajapariyatkavi (Somjin Wanjan), Rector of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Wang Noi, Ayutthaya, Thailand; (2) Emeritus Prof. Dr. Pahalawattage Don Premasiri, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka; (3) Emeritus Prof. Dr. Peter Harvey, University of Sunderland, United Kingdom; (4) Prof. Dr. Phillip D. Stanley, Naropa University, Colorado, United States; (5) Dr. Supriya Rai, Director, K. J. Somaiya Centre for Buddhist Studies, India; (6) Prof. Dr. Sakurai Yoshihide, Graduate School of Letters, Hokkaido University, Japan; and (7) Assoc. Prof. Dr. G Clinton Godart, Graduate School of International Cultural Studies, Tohoku University, Japan.

6. Finalizing a completed version of the research project report, starting by identifying significant research findings; compilation of bodies of knowledge and insights. Then it is formulating conclusions, conducting discussions, as well as suggesting useful information for possible further researches.

## Findings

### 1. The Concept of Balance of Family in Buddhism and the Theory of Family Behavior in Psychology

Balance of Family means a happy, good and balance relationship of a group of persons who live together consisting either of spouse or parents-children. Family members adopt a similar pattern of Buddhist virtuous behavior existing in equal and mutually beneficial amounts.

First, Balance of Family for a Spouse, where husbands and wives live together without children. The term “spouse” here particularly denotes a marriage family where a husband and a wife living together with no children. Therefore the term “marriage” or *Āvāhana* (nt.) [*ā + vshana, of vah*] may possibly be rendered into two meanings: 1. Marriage

or taking a wife (D.I.11; “*āvāha - karaṇa*” - DA.I.96; Walshe, 1987) 2. getting up or bringing together (Davids, 1921).

In Buddhism, a type of marriage was mentioned in the *Jātakas* was called *Svayamāra* wherein usually a girl but sometimes a boy chose a partner from a number of suitors. Such ceremonies would usually take place at a public gathering. The *Tipitaka* mentions the Buddha’s wife and his son *Rāhula* so we know he was married, but it provides no information about what kind of marriage he had or his wedding ceremony. However, later fictional biographies of the Buddha usually portray him as having a *Svayamāra* marriage which suggests that this was the type of marriage that early Buddhists thought of as the ideal (Law, 1926).

Therefore, in order to make a balance family, a spouse needs to have both qualities, equitable and responsibilities of husbands and wives according to the Buddhist teachings, for instance, they should both have virtues for the laity or *gharavāsa-dhamma* (S.I.215; Sn.189; Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2000), *samajīvidhamma* (A.II.61; Woodward, 1982), endowing with responsibilities as suggested in the *Sīgālovāda Sutta* (D.III.189-192; Walshe, 1987), and living together as deity spouse instead of ghost (A.II.57; Woodward, 1982).

Second, Balance of Family for Parents and Children, where parents and children mutually share the common Buddhist teachings, such as filial piety (*kataññūkataveditā*) as the saying in the *Anguttara-Nikāya*: “These two persons are hard to find in the world. What two? The one who is first to do a favour and he who is grateful for what is done.” (A.I.87; Woodward, 1979). This shows that both parents and children are convinced to practice filial piety. In addition, they should also train themselves with responsibilities of parents and children as same ways as stated in the *Sīgālovāda Sutta* (D.III.190; Walshe, 1987).

**The Theory of Family Behavior in Psychology:** Psychological Family Problems shown there are more psychiatric problems that can damage the feeding relationship, for example, maternal depression, social isolation, alcohol use and substance abuse, domestic violence, etc. (Dawson, 2003). Since the introduction of divorce and separation is marital conflict and if not controlled by a way to solve this problem, marriage ends in divorce.

Criticism of Family Behavioral Theories gives way to various theories relating to family behaviors. For example, the Parson’s theory that says about structural-functional perspective, in which society was viewed as an organism striving to resist change and to maintain itself in a state of equilibrium. Then the Planned Behavior Theory (PBT) that links

one's beliefs and behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Next the Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1978) describes the equal significance of each member in a family and the equilibrium of the member unit. This combination of different perspectives of each theory elaborates on the family matter in terms of systems, structure, compositions, behaviors, relationships, and interactions among members. It is a challenge to the multidisciplinary education that combines psychology, anthropology, science, sociology etc. that are waiting to be integrated into vital science in religion and philosophy.

## **2. Human Behaviors in Promoting Balance of Family according to Buddhist Psychology**

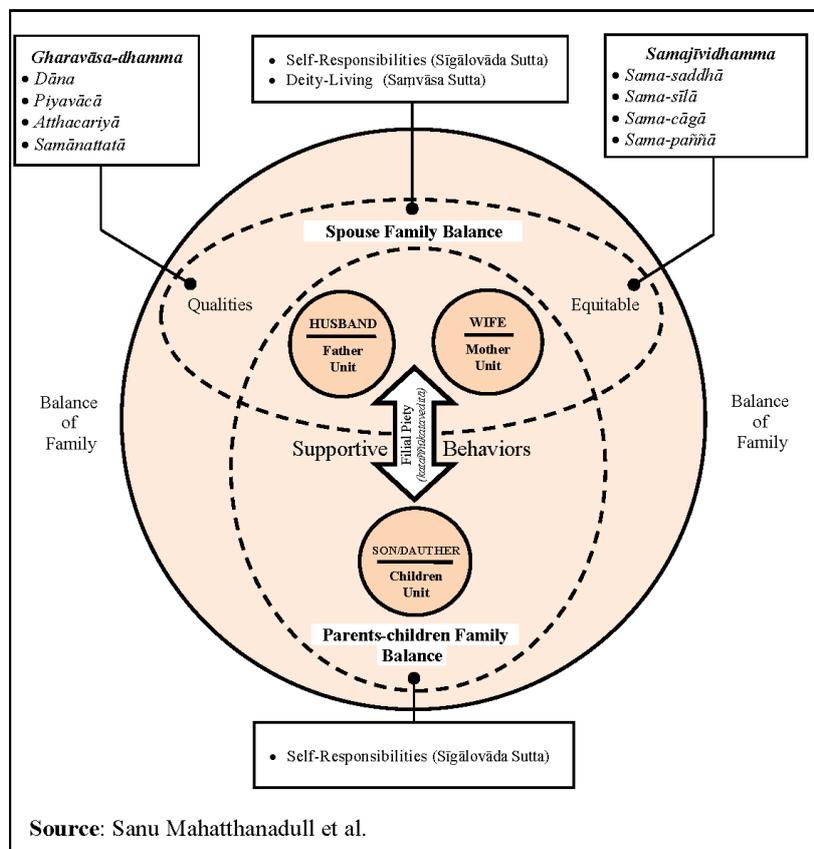
Various behaviors which support to the family is an indispensable thing for family institutions are important to society and the nation. Family is the very first basic institution in which family members are cultivated in their traditions, beliefs, values and religious beliefs. If family members are strong enough both physically and mentally, he or she will be immune in society as well. Supporting behaviors therefore play a crucial role in family members as positive behaviors in fulfilling one another's emotions and feelings, especially when they really need help in every area of their lives. However, through the optimal matching model (OMM), there are five major types of supportive behaviors (Cutrona, 1990; Cutrona and Russell, 1990; Cutrona and Suhr, 1992).

First, Emotional Support: Each member in a family should sincerely give emotional support to the other members at all times by expressions of care or empathy. It is in order to promote good relationship and build good trust among family members whether with a spouse, husband, wife, mother, father, son or daughters, etc. Second, Esteem Support: A person can truly respect others wholeheartedly only when he respects himself. Therefore, self-acceptance and self-respect is the first thing to do. Self-acceptance is the basic ability of one's own good qualities. Each member in a family should wholeheartedly give expressions of respect towards the other members regardless of ages, genders, whether young or old Female or male. Third, Social Network Support: A properly supported social network will strengthen the groups of good friend (*kalyanamittatā*). In which it affects social strength in order to help the job, communication, interactions, or even daily life of family is smoother. Especially when encountered with emergency circumstances, these social networks can provide help from those hardships. Fourth, Tangible Support: Submitting help when needed is a pleasurable kind of human behavior. Helping is to support other members who are in

trouble both in the physical and mental areas. In terms of Psychology is to reduce stress that may cause a big problem if the problem is not resolved in a timely manner. Therefore, members should provide immediate help by offering assistance or any resources. Fifth, Informational Support: supportive behaviors bond together good relationship in all dimensions from internal to external, individual to social. Just as a wise man cannot endure with deception, families are not worthy of false or misrepresented data and information. Each family member must give informational support to others. One should try to share facts regularly, including helpful advices at the right time.

At the end, the following model is adapted from the “Family Systems Theory” (Balswick; Balswick, 2014) for use in this research to exhibit the human behaviors in terms of the relationship among Buddhist virtuous practices, family systems and family’s state of balance.

**Figure 1: Human Behaviors in Promoting Balance of Family According to Buddhist Psychology**



Source: Sanu Mahatthanadull et al.

Explanation based on family system theory makes us understand the 2 subsystems that interact with each other; that are the overlapping two dashed ovals, upper and lower. The upper oval represents the 1<sup>st</sup> subsystem is the SPOUSE family system consisting of a husband and a wife. Both members will be able to access the family balance only when the compulsory balancing elements are fulfilled, namely: - (1) qualities of the virtues for the laity (*gharavāsa-dhamma*), (2) equitable (*samajīvidhamma*), (3) self-responsibilities (*Śīgālovāda Sutta*), and (4) living together as deity spouse. The lower oval defines the 2<sup>nd</sup> subsystem is the PARENTS-CHILDREN system consisting of a husband, a wife, and their son-daughter (children unit). In this system where a couple living with their children, a husband and a wife will immediately change their roles, duties and responsibilities from spouses to a father (father unit) and a mother (mother unit) in order to maintain a co-existence between parents and children. All members will be able to access the family balance only when the compulsory balancing elements are fulfilled, namely: - (1) filial piety (*kataññūkataveditā*) in a reciprocally manner between parents and children, and (2) self-responsibilities (*Śīgālovāda Sutta*). Supporting behavior based on psychological theory, centered on the model, plays a crucial role as a support for a balanced family to be formed quickly, strong, and sustainably. Holistic balance may occur in the circumstance where both family sub-systems maintain the virtue and goodness of living their own family lives. With the emergence of such balance, the global equilibrium will then emerge in an ideal society where only the qualified family institutions are united.

## Conclusion

The implication of Balance of Family reflects a true meaning of how a group of persons living together in harmony. The two categories of balance of family, namely: - balance of Family for a Spouse and balance of Family for Parents and Children, represent the equilibrium of living together with the virtue of each member within the family. Such those balances help strengthen the behaviors of the family members to far away from violence, stealing behavior, having affair, deception, substance abuse, etc. as well as those negative behaviors.

In additions, the theory of family behavior in psychology exhibits the family problems relating to individual ethics, such as, domestic violence and sexual misconduct,

etc. Such problems are family imbalance that needs the Buddhist Psychology to explain for the perfect balance of family. As there are five types of supportive behaviors dealing with family, namely: - 1) Emotional support, 2) Esteem support, 3) Social network support, 4) Tangible support, and 5) Informational support. Buddhist families literally need this knowledge to strengthen their family balance.

## Suggestions

### 1. Policy Suggestions

1) The international psychology centers, International counseling centers, foundations and organizations that focus on studying and counseling in family should develop the series of knowledge and publicize the body of knowledge to the family members in societies to the most widespread.

2) The Government sectors, for example, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development, state-enterprises, and private sectors should develop the series of knowledge and publicize the body of knowledge to the interesting people to the most widespread.

### 2. Suggestions for Further Research

In conducting this research, according to the objectives established including the scope of the research, there are some restrictions on the operation. However, the researcher team offers suggestions for further research as follows:

- 1) A Model of Buddhist Filial Piety (*kataññūkataveditā*) for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Family;
- 2) A Constitution of Family Life according to Buddhist Psychology;
- 3) Buddhist Psychology for Family Responsibilities: Integration between *Sīgālovāda* Sutta and Psychology.

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