

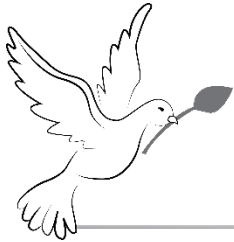
Development of Thai Family Functioning Model (TFFM): Grounded Theory Method*

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Abstract

Family functioning denotes a set of basic characteristics about family system regarding appraisal, function, and performance. Healthy family functioning has been viewed as a protective factor for reducing/preventing adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and other mental disorders, enhancing rate of rehabilitation/recovery and increasing quality of life of patients both with physical and mental disorders and their families. Family functioning models that are available based upon western cultures, believes, and societies. Since society, culture, and Buddhist teachings influence Thai family dynamics, which may not capture by those western family functioning models. In addition, the focus and interpretations of the developers of a particular model also affect constructing of such models. Therefore, it is necessary to examine particular characteristics of family functioning based upon Thai context. The purpose of this study was to investigate the fundamental attributes that promote family to function well within Thai context leading to construct a model of Thai family functioning. Data were collected by in-depth semi-structured interviews. There were 9 healthy families as informants. Grounded theory method was used to analyze qualitative data. The result of this study discovered 2 core categories, Coexistence and Family Atmosphere. Coexistence category has 2 sub-categories as Intention to Maintain Family and Interactions whereas Family Atmosphere has 4 sub-categories as Problem-Solving, Cohesion, Communication, and Understanding & Accepting. All categories and sub-categories are interrelated to each other. In conclusion, Thai Family Functioning Model (TFFM) was constructed. It composes of 2 main categories, Coexistence (with Intention to Maintain Family and Interactions as sub categories) and Family Atmosphere (with Problem-Solving, Cohesion, Communication, and



Understanding & Accepting as sub categories). TFFM may help to guide researches and professional practicing to strengthening/ improving family functioning of families in various situations leading to better outcomes in terms of creativeness, quality of life, rehabilitation/recovery, and promotion/prevention.

Keywords: Development; Thai Family Functioning Model (TFFM); Grounded Theory Method

Introduction

Family functioning refers to a set of basic attributes about the family system that describes how a family system typically appraises, operates, and/or behaves (McCubbin, and Thompson, 1991). It is a multidimensional concept that family members interact, collaborate (Botha, and Booysen, 2013), communicate, connect, sustain relationships, make decisions, and solve problems in order to attain common goals and outcomes (Sven et al. 2006; Walker, and Shepherd, 2008). It is also related to nurturance, provision, personal development promotion, and family system management and maintenance (Epstein, Baldwin, and Bishop, 1983). Thus, it is more associated to properties of the family system and social and structural properties of the family environment which include interactions and relationships within the family, especially conflict and cohesion levels, adaptability, organization, and quality of communication (Alderfer et al. 2008). Family environment with clear communication, well-defined roles, cohesion, and well emotional control leads to healthy family functioning. In contrast, families with high levels of disagreement, disorganization, and poor emotional and behavioral control contribute to poor family functioning (Lewandowski et al. 2010).

The concept of family functioning has been used extensively in many areas including strengthening normal families (Walker, and Shepherd, 2008; Roman et al. 2016) and improving families with various physical health problems (Lewandowski et al. 2010; Everhart, 2014) and mental disorders (Sheidow, Henry, Tolan, and Strachan, 2014; Hsiao, and Tsai, 2014; Koutra, Triliva, Roumeliotaki, Lionis, and Vgontzas, 2015; Kobayashi, Fukushima, Kitaoka, Shimizu, and Shimanouchi, 2015). However, this family functioning concept that has been used in various researches is based upon different models of family functioning, which has different dimensions, attributes, or characteristics; for example, the McMaster Model of Family Functioning (MMFF) developed by Epstein, Bishop and Levin (1978) contains dimensions of problem solving,



communication, roles, affective responsiveness, affective involvement, and behavior control. The Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems developed by Olson, Russell and Sprenkle, (1982) comprises of family cohesion, flexibility (previously named adaptability), and communication, while the Beavers Systems Model of Family Functioning developed by Beavers and Hampson (2000) encompasses competence and style dimensions. In addition, the Process Model of Family Functioning developed by Steinhauer, Santa-Barbara and Skinner (1984) has task accomplishment, role performance, communication (including affective expression), affective involvement, and control as its dimensions. These family functioning models have a variety of concepts that are based on western cultures, values, beliefs, and socioeconomic context, for example, the developers of the MMFF stated that their model is based upon a set of Judaeo-Christian values (Epstein et al. 1978). It is important to investigate the variety that illustrates families, in particular relating to pattern, structure, culture, and social contexts of such families. This will lead to a better understanding of the response or the adaptation to the environment that challenges the families (Dilworth-Anderson, Burton, and Johnson, 2008). Cultural norms and rules guide what and how families perform; that is, they guide family members in identifying, defying, and attempting to solve their problems (McGoldrick, 1993; Walsh, 2003).

Thai culture is unique and different from other cultures, in particular Western or North American cultures. Several concepts are more significant in Thai families, culture, and society than others. In particular, Buddhism has guided Thai culture and society for a long time (Limnonda, 1995) and more than 93.5 percent of Thais are Buddhist (National Statistical Office, 2018). Many of the Buddhist teachings influence social values and codes of ethics and behaviors among Thai families. Each family functioning model has different dimensions or components reflecting to the values and beliefs of the developers of such models (Anderson, and Sabatelli, 2011). Furthermore, these western models of family functioning are based upon the focus and interpretations of the developers of a particular model (Walsh, 2012). Thus, basic components of family functioning are arranged and conveyed in quite different ways and to different degrees as they are suitable to different family structures, resources, and restraints; family and cultural values; and the life challenges unique to each family. Analysis of family functioning models in order to obtain the family functioning model that is international and can be used with all cultures and societies is very difficult (Walsh, 2012). In addition, it is important to concern that what is adaptive in one



culture, society, or context may not be adaptive in another culture, society, or context (Cox, and Paley, 2003). Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the fundamental attributes that are important for Thai families to function well in Thai culture and socio-economic contexts in order to develop a model of Thai family functioning which there is no such model available.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this study was to investigate the basic attributes that are essential for families to function properly within Thai contexts leading to construct a model of Thai family functioning.

Research Methodology

Participants: The subjects were family members aged 12 years and older. Data were collected from 9 nuclear families classified as healthy or functional families. The informants were 18 parents and 7 children/adolescents. They were living in Bangkok, Thailand. Purposive sampling method with the criteria based on nuclear family, no family history of mental problems and/or suicide, and no family crisis within 3 months before this interview was applied to include the informants. The participants were introduced to this research by using the principles of reference and the snowball sampling technique.

Method: Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted to collect data and tape recorded. The grand tour questions (Glaser, and Strauss, 1967) which are important questions, for example, "What are the characteristics or behaviors in your family that make your family live happily together?" After receiving the answers of grand tour questions, the informant would be asked more questions in order to get more details on each issue in terms of how the informant experienced/used/or managed the methods or processes, including exploring the elements that supported or discouraged the attributes of family that made the family live together effectively. For example, "Please tell me more about how to communicate in your family". Open-ended questions were employed. All samples were asked in the same manner. The interview took approximately 1 hour for each informants. Each interview was taped record and transcribed to transcripts for analysis. After analysis the first set of transcripts, the sets of questions for interview



were adjusted and data collection process was improved in order to obtain extensive information leading to ensure data saturation. Moreover, data collection was carried out simultaneously with the constant comparative method (Glaser, and Struss, 1967; Glaser, 1992). Data collection process was ended when the results of the data analysis were not found any new codes. That is, the obtained data was saturated.

Risk and Prevention from Harm: There was no severe risk in participating in this research. The questions did not delve into the personal issues of family members. All family information or issue was kept confidentially. If the informant feels anxious, frustrated, or distress from this interview, the researcher planned to provide family or individual counselling in order to alleviate such distress. Fortunately, there was no any harmful situation occurred. The data/information of this research was kept in the filing cabinet with lock. Only the research team could access the data/information. In addition, the information sheet did not specify the name, surname or any symbols that would indicate the identity of the informant. The number was employed to code information sheet instead. In addition, all information/data was carefully presented without clarification of the informants' identity.

Data Analysis: Qualitative data were analyzed by employing grounded theory approach. The interview transcripts were read line by line in order to identify substantive codes that reflect the important elements of being a family. The comparison of those substantive codes helped to group some codes that had similar characteristics/attributes into the same categories. Then, categories that had similar properties were combined into theoretical categories that are connected or interrelated. During data analysis, if the researcher had any points of view, whether opinions expression, suggestion, questions for further probing, additional information for searching, and hypothesis setting, etc., the researcher recorded those ideas which is called memo writing. These memos are useful for data storage, data analysis, including constructing connection of various relationships leading to creation of the Thai family functioning model. Furthermore, all categories were traced back, examined, and checked with those who were involved in the research in order to confirm for validity of constructing the TFFM.

Results

The results of this study created a model of family functioning with certain aspects that are particular and important for Thai families to function well. This Thai Family Functioning Model (TFFM) consists of the 2 cores categories, "Coexistence" and "Family Atmosphere." Coexistence has 2 sub-categories as "Intention to Maintain Family" and "Interactions." while Family Atmosphere has 4 sub-categories as "Cohesion," "Understanding and Accepting," "Communication," and "Problem-Solving." All cores categories and sub-categories of the TFFM are related and affected to each other. They are a basic family process and attributes that facilitate efficient Thai family dynamics as presented in figure 1.

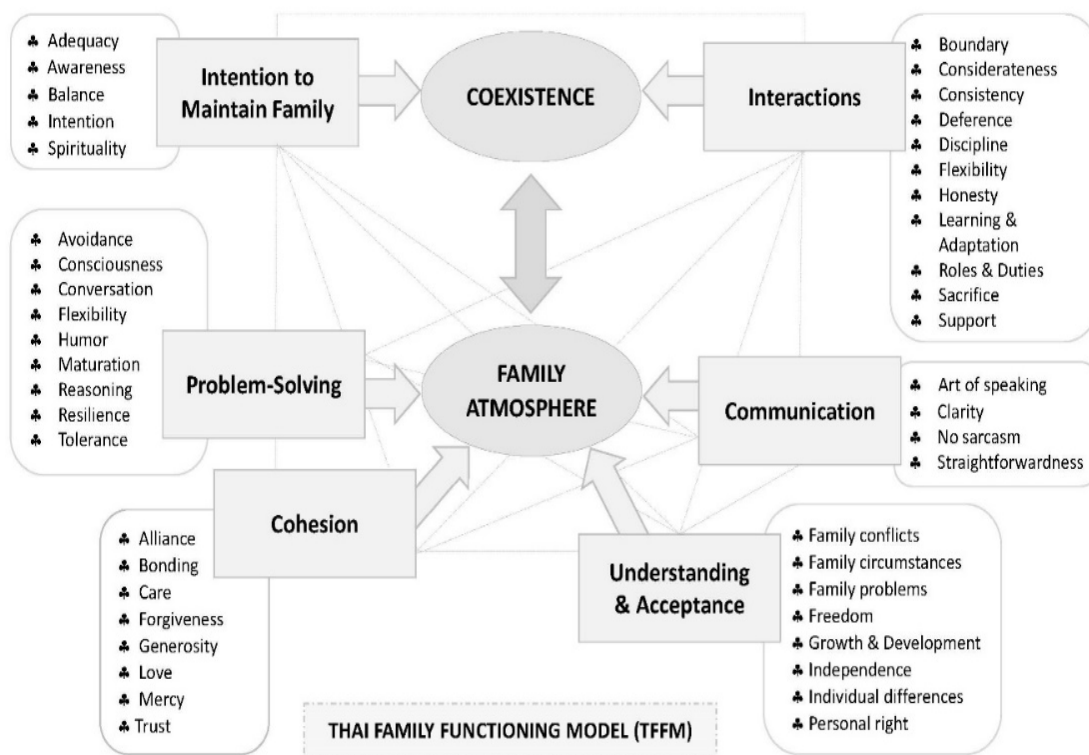


Figure 1: Thai Family Functioning Model (TFFM)

Coexistence:

Coexistence is one of an important element in the performance of the family. Many family members said that *"A picture of being a unit composing of many family members is important*



to be a family.” “If each family member lives separately and does not join activities together, it does not portray of being a family. To be a family, family members have to live together.” Therefore, coexistence is important to form effective and happy family because this is opportunities to have family interactions, communication, learning each other leading to understanding and acceptance, adaptation, growth and development, and finally establishing cohesion. The dimension of coexistence has 2 sub-dimensions or sub-categories as “Intention to Maintain Family” and “Interactions.”

Intention to Maintain Family

Intention to Maintain Family is likely to be an obvious and central goal for performing various family activities/interactions. Such intention reminds family members to aware of adequate performance of their roles and duties, their words, interactions, coping methods, and family spirituality mutually resulting to understanding and acceptance and cohesion. This renders balance and unity of the family with the purpose of keeping a family. Many informants described that *“Intension to be a family they don’t expect to be very rich, they prefer to have proper happiness according to one’s self.” “It is not worth, if we don’t have time for our children but we have more money. So we decided not to open another shop.” Then, we have better time for our children.”* This statement indicates that an awareness of the intention to maintain a family made them to balance their works and family life and live adequately. Another important factor that also facilitates family homeostasis is *spirituality* which involves hope, faith, and religion. Religion has a great influence on living as a family as one family member described that *“Religion affects family life. We have applied religion in family life in the sense of philosophy, not a ritual. Even though we really don’t go to the temple very often, we study Buddhism continuously”* and *“what makes our family live together happily is virtue.”*

Interactions

Family interaction is a matter of family members spending time and join various activities together as the informant said that *“Everyone dines together. It causes interaction in the family.”* Effective interactions within family should have clear boundary, roles and duties, and discipline. Additionally, considerateness, consistency, deference, flexibility, honesty, sacrifice, and support are other traits that are applicable for Thai family interaction. All of these features lead to learning and adaptation of the family. Some examples involving the informants’ opinion are shown.



Honesty: *"Our family won't lie. Honesty is an important principle for being a family."*

Considerateness: *"Everyone must know his/her extent he/she has and will not interfere others."*

Consistency: *"Consistency is also important for family interaction, in particular discipline and the performance of roles and duties". In addition, consistency in care and paying attention is very important for family relationship.),*

Deference: *"Paying respect to older one is important in Thai society and for family it also includes respect to privacy of family members."*

Flexibility: *"Rules and discipline have to be there, but they shouldn't be too strict like living in soldier camp, then nobody feels happy, comfortable, peaceful, and cheerful. If everybody has to comply with rigid rules, It would become a family that whether be happy or unhappy. So, they must be flexible."*

Roles and Duties: *"Adults must teach children regarding their duties. In addition, adults have to aware of their duties also as role models. Father has a duty of being father. The mother has a duty of a being mother. Daughter and son also have their duties which may be similar in some aspects and different in other aspects. Everyone has to act on his/her roles and duties."*

Sacrifice and Spirituality: *"My husband sacrifices physically, mentally, and money. He rarely has his own personal life. He uses dharma to guide his life and family."*

Support: *"When there is a problem, mom and dad never blame us. We can consult them and they will give good advice and find a solution." "They need to be encouraged as well."*

Family Atmosphere:

Family atmosphere means the state of feelings and the climate within the household that affects to all family members. In addition, the atmosphere of the family also means parents' attitudes towards various matters. There are 4 sub-categories as Problem-Solving, Cohesion, Understanding & Accepting, and Communication that contribute to family atmosphere.

Problem-Solving

Many strategies have been used in the family to solve conflicts or problems. These strategies are *avoidance, consciousness, conversation, flexibility, humor, and reasoning*. Even though some strategies may be viewed negatively, in the real life sometimes avoidance to have



argument or conflict is better than confrontation. In order to solve the problem effectively, maturation is very important, in particular emotional maturation which is helpful for understanding, tolerance, and establishing resilience. Some examples of conversation with the informants are described below.

"The solution of one person may affect the feelings of another person. It needs to be considered because different people think differently. It is likely we had to wear other people's glasses in order to understand their world. Therefore, it must be thought before speaking in terms of how it would affect others" This statement indicates that the family applied consciousness, and flexibility in particular having maturation to solve problems.

Cohesion

Family cohesion is viewed as the emotional bonding that occurs in the family (Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1982) which make family members providing care, love, mercy, trust, forgiveness, and generosity to each other.

"Family that is harmonious or fills with love is likely to have no conflict." *"We know what we need to do to make our families harmonious and strong."* These 2 statements point to importance of family cohesion. Further statements are described about forgiveness and Generosity. *"The important components to hold to be a family are the first one must be love; the second one must be understanding each other; and the last one is forgiveness."* Generosity in the family express via helping to do household chores, if they are available because sometimes they have their own tasks to complete, which we understand and won't ask them to help a lot. When they are free or during school break, they will help us."

Understanding & Acceptance

Understanding and acceptance are components that help or nurture living together and maintaining family relationships. When understanding occurs leading to acceptance and likewise, when acceptance occurs, it will lead to more understanding. Such dynamic causes good family atmosphere and coexistence. More specifically understanding and acceptance of individual differences and family problems and circumstances will ease to solve family conflicts and allows family members to have appropriate freedom, personal right, and independence. In addition, understanding and acceptance individual differences contributes to promote growth and



development of each family member. That is, understanding and acceptance contributes to all other categories. The examples of the informant's words are shown below.

"There were many conflicts occurred very often during initial phase of being a family. When we had a child, we had adjusted to each other more and more, not setting too high criteria, then the more acceptance arose, the less problems appeared." This statement indicates understanding and acceptance, learning and adaptation as well as growth and development of the family.

Communication

Family communication includes the process of transferring and exchange. The older ones transfer information, knowledge, experiences, and faith to younger generation of the family. In addition, they also exchange and convey their feelings, emotions, opinions, needs, and information within family. Characteristics of effective communication in Thai family are art of communication, clarity, straightforwardness, and no sarcasm. Some examples of conversation with the informants are described below.

"Sometimes it should take time for some situations, had to wait, and should not talk at that time. However, some issues that are, for example, dangerous, we had to talk immediately."
"If there is something happen, we will discuss and convey others to be known all the time"
Theses statements portray the art of communication, clarity, straightforwardness and no sarcasm.

Discussion

Thai Family Functioning Model (TFFM) which has "Coexistence" and "Family Atmosphere" as its core categories. Coexistence indicates that Thai families are collectivist that needs to be together and having interactions. People in collectivist cultures are interdependently bound together in tight groups and tend to perceive closeness between members of the group (Triandis, 2018). Thai families impose their norms and duties, give priority to the goals of their families over their own personal goals, and emphasize their connectedness to their family members, which view themselves as parts of their family (Suttiamnuaykul, 2002). This affects to the atmosphere of Thai families. In contrast, Americans and Canadians are concerned as individualism and primarily motivated by their own preferences, needs, and rights. They tend to view themselves as independent of collectives (Triandis, 2018). Therefore, family functioning models constructed in



such contexts do not have its dimension as coexistence. However, there are several dimensions of TFFM that are similar to the dimensions of western family functioning models, for example, communication dimension is also occurred in the Process Model of Family Functioning (Steinhauer, Santa-Barbara, and Skinner, 1984), the Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems (Olson, Russell, and Sprenkle, 1982), and the MMFF (Epstein, Bishop, and Levin, 1978). Cohesion sub-category of the TFFM is also similar to the category of the Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems as well as problem solving sub-category that is presented in the MMFF. Furthermore, various properties of the TFFM such as flexibility, roles and duties, discipline, and support are alike those dimensions of western family functioning models as well. This indicates that these characteristics are important for dynamic process of the family in every culture and society. Since the emphasis and explanations of the inventors of a specific model have great influence on strategies to create such model (Walsh, 2012) make these family functioning models different in some features and similar in some aspects. Additionally, various sub-categories and properties of the TFFM are also similar to the five-factor structure (support, discipline, communication and problem solving, emotional status and relationship) of the Family State and Functioning Assessment Scale (FSFAS) (Supphapitiphon, Buathong, and Suppapitiporn, 2019) which was developed based upon Thai context.

New Body of Knowledge

The results of this study yield the body of knowledge regarding important basic components for Thai families to function efficiently leading to be a qualified family. The model of family functioning which is appropriate to Thai contexts was created as a Thai Family Functioning Model (TFFM).

Conclusion

This study was a process research approach with theoretical sampling, constant comparative data analysis, and memos. The theoretical model arose from the open coding process and code selection (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Strauss, and Corbin, 1990, 1998) inducing generation of the reasoning relationship model called Thai Family Functioning Model (TFFM) which composes of 2 core categories, “Coexistence” and “Family Atmosphere. Coexistence has 2 sub-categories as Intention to Maintain Family and Interaction whereas Family Atmosphere has 4



sub-categories as Problem-Solving, Cohesion, Understanding and Acceptance, and Communication. They are clearly grounded in the interviewed data and has a reciprocal relationship among core categories and sub-categories. TFFM is a form of logic in terms of causal conditions, strategies, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, interaction processes, and consequences, therefore, they can be used as family strategies. TFFM will contribute to the research, education, and various professional practices involving families in terms of guiding to develop intervention programs for prevention/promotion or therapeutic programs in order to strengthening or empowering the family, which is considered as important environment in all ages and situations.

Suggestion

Since this research studied only single-family in Bangkok, therefore, extended, homosexual, and cohabitating families and Thai families with other religion besides Buddhism should be further studied. In addition, a family focused group should be performed as well along with the in-depth interview of each family. These will strengthen family functioning model of Thais to be more profound and comprehensive.

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