

Homelife Stressors and Their Long-Term Impact

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INTRODUCTION

There are five theories on human development: Psychoanalytic, Behaviorist, Cognitive, Sociocultural, and Evolutionary- all playing a large role in how humans: interact with one another, battle unconscious impulses, respond to stimuli, form concepts, learn values of society, and develop the need to survive and reproduce (Berger, 2017). From a sociocultural perspective, a lot of these traits we learn are more nurture rather than nature. From birth to old age, connections are being made socially and cognitively from sensorimotor functioning levels to advanced formal operational levels. Family functioning is a very in-depth topic that be used to further examine the effects on children as they grow into adulthood. There are certain necessities that must exist in these family homes to insure a healthy development- physically, mentally, and emotionally. However, there are certain life circumstances that can serve as a barrier to a stress-free lifestyle. A few that have been annotated are relocation, divorce, and unemployment (Berger, 2017). All of which are understood to a more sophisticated degree by the parents and can affect their children depending on their child's age, genes, and gender. It is not until the ages of six to eleven that children start to cognitively apply logic and begin to have a thinking experience from direct experiences.

A study was conducted to measure the effects of high-conflict divorce on separating families. The goal was to further understand the level of internalizing and externalizing problems that resulted withing the children of separated parents. The child's perception was one of the measurement tools that were used to determine frequency of stressful situations that were displayed by the parents and it was concluded that parental quality (PQ) can have an effect on their child's externalizing and internalizing problems, post-divorce (Hara, Sandler, Wolchik, Tein, & Rhodes, 2019).

Several adults were surveyed on their current relationship satisfaction, personal trauma history and other participant data history to further uncover complications that can occur in family homes that may have impact on the family function and the current mental state of these families. There was a total of twenty-two respondents who participated in a ten-item survey.

KEYWORDS: Psychology; Family Psychology; CBT; Family Therapy; Family Survey

FAMILY FOCUSED GRIEF THERAPY

As mentioned through previous findings regarding the topic of family trauma, we can now go in on how the negative effects are treated. Family Focused Grief Therapy (FFGT) has been used to assist families that are or were dealing with a chronic illness. One home issue that was not addressed in the survey that was created with Survey Monkey was the question of whether the participant had a family member at home who is dealing with a long-term illness.

The FFGT Method

Francesca Del Gaudio wanted to observe FFGT in action to help determine holes that may exist in the treatment process (GoodTherapy, 2013). The first two sessions that were observed consisted of thirty-two therapists and seventy-four families that had a family member who was living with cancer. It was found that the core focuses during FFGT were communication, coping, relationship behaviors, members' roles, and family core values (GoodTherapy, 2013). The issues that appeared to not be addressed were family conflict along with the failure to address a formal treatment plan in most of the cases.

Family Interventions

Family therapy is a very common form of psychotherapy that has been used by therapists to help reduce family stress and assist families in dealing with issues that happen at home. Just like all patient needs and treatment plans, the conditions and aspects that are focused on in therapy are very individualized. Below is a chart with a few examples of conditions and the type of therapy that is used for each category (Varghese, Kirpekar, & Loganathan, 2020).

Table 1

Types and grades of family interventions

Family psychoeducation (basic information)	Family interventions (specific information)	Family therapy (systemic framework)
Depression and anxiety	Medication supervision	Schizophrenia with poor prognosis
Schizophrenia and bipolar disorders (psychoses)	Marriage and pregnancy counseling	Conduct and personality disorders
Alcohol use disorders	Job-related counseling	Chronic neurotic conditions
Child and adolescent conditions/issues	Future plans- education, stress	Severe expressed emotions
Organic brain disorders	Coping and stigma	Family discord and major conflicts
Any other illness	Behavioral management (e.g., contracting) Improving communication	

Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih. 1>

Family therapy goals may include a few of the most common that may come to mind: marital problems, parent-child conflict, sibling conflict behaviors, emotion expression, etc.

Challenges in Therapy

Unfortunately, even with the best intentions, humans are imperfect creations. We have studied books and published articles about how to preform psychological therapy sessions all while discovering new information every day. However, there is still so much that we do not know about the brain. Those who are too eager to help may jump straight to conclusions and suggestions, silencing the family (Varghese, Kirpekar, & Loganathan, 2020). Other circumstances may be a lack of control over the therapy session by the therapist, lack of involvement of all the members during sessions, and/or not including all members of the family in every session. Taking sides appeared to be an identified problem as well, along with the family members’ communication with other therapists outside of the therapy. Having too much help rather than not enough may not sound like a bad idea, however, the input from more than one therapist may stray the family from a specific course of treatment being offered by one of the therapists.

The observation of family focused grief therapy identified several underlying issues that were not being addressed during FFGT while *Family Interventions: Basic Principles and Techniques* identified problems that are most common amongst those who are undergoing family therapy. Together, it has shown that catching these issues is not necessarily a downfall, but a very large achievement. Exposure of these common problems will undoubtedly lessen the occurrence in the future.

American Statistics

In 1970, fifteen in every one-thousand marriages had ended in divorce. In 2019, America had then reached a record low for divorce rates for the first time in fifty years (Wang, 2020). Tragedy struck America in 2020 with a pandemic due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19), causing a nation-wide lockdown that has been known to contribute to stress-related issues within couples. However, Wang annotates that fifty-eight percent of those who were surveyed showed that the pandemic has brought couples closer together, while also bringing forward a stronger level of appreciation for their significant other (2020). While an overall decrease in divorce has also been recorded, it is predicted that an increase in divorce will follow, due to pent up demands. As a result of divorce, children will be a product of divorced parents. While all children process experiences differently, it was noted that divorce often harms male children more than female children (Berger, 2018).

10 Item Survey Results

With an average completion rate of one minute and thirteen seconds, twenty participants were conveniently selected to take a ten-item survey created with Survey Monkey (Lara, PSYU 301: 10 Item Family Survey, 2020). The survey was publicly solicited on Facebook, Twitter, and through individual texts messages with the added comment that the preferred audience is married couples and participants with children. This is a broad survey that was created to identify common stressors and underlying complications that contribute to stress in homes that create long-lasting problems. After being available for forty-eight hours, the final results were analyzed.

Question Summaries

The first two survey questions were used to collect background information of the participant- their current relationship status and how many children they currently have. Fourteen of the twenty participants presented as married (70%), three participants were single (15%), two participants were divorced (10%), and one participant declared a separated relationship status. Ten participants were found to have two children (50%), two participants presented with zero children (10%), three participants presented with one child (15%), two participants presented with three children (10%), and three participants presented with four or more children (15%). When asked about the gender of their children, the gender rates were close to an even distribution all across the board. The percentages of families who had female children, male children, or a combination of both were all very closely related.

When asked about current level of mental and emotional satisfaction in regard to the participant's current relationship, eleven of the twenty participants presented as "very satisfied" while nine participants presented as either "slightly satisfied" or "not satisfied".

Questions five, six, and seven were created to identify: how many participants have undergone some sort of traumatic event, whether or not their children experienced the event with them, and whether or not the participant felt they were able to deal with and overcome the event in a healthy way. 65% of participants claimed to have been through a traumatic incident during their current relationship, and 35% of participants claimed that their children witnessed the traumatic incident with them. Overall results for survey question seven revealed that most participants were able to face and overcome the incident in a healthy way.

When asked about frequent stressors with answer choices work, school, my children, my significant other, and other, work and significant other were the top two options that were selected.

Survey question ten revealed that overall, 60% of participants were confident that their family as a whole are in a good mental, physical and emotional state. Unfortunately, 25% either disagreed or strongly disagreed that their family as a whole are in a good mental, physical, and emotional state.

DIFFICULT HOME ENVIRONMENTS

There are studies showing that some stress, but not too much stress, is good and can aid cognition in early childhood (Berger, 2018). In regard to memory, experiences are often stored more efficiently when there is some sort of emotional stimulation attached to the encounter. This is how we learn, prevent the reassurance of unpleasant experiences, and adapt to familiar ones (2018). Jean Piaget's 'Periods of Cognitive Development' reveals that from the ages of two to six, children are viewing the world from their own perspective and it is not until the ages of six to eleven that they start making cognitive connections and applying logic based off of direct experiences (2018). So, how does this work when faced with traumatic experiences? Families are often faced with different stressors and spend a good amount of time developing a sense of resiliency. However, stress can accumulate over an extended period of time and with the addition of traumatic stress, resiliency can become more difficult. Children in middle childhood were found

more likely to recover from traumatic events (Berger, 2018). Families who are struggling with ongoing adversities would appear to be a complex subject to look at due to the fact that resiliency cannot be accurately measured to its fullest extent (Laurel, Nurse, Lucksted, & Collins, 2008). These stressful events can create lasting problems, however, they can also be seen as an opportunity to focus on the positive that is present in one's life. While the sayings can get quite repetitive and appear as a cliché, hardships within a family often do create a stronger bond within the home. Family structure and healthy functioning is a key tool in the prevention and coping of traumatic incidents and stressful situations. It was also found helpful to restore normal daily routines (Berger, 2018).

DEMOGRAPHICS

Family issues that may arise in American homes can sometimes be narrowed down to specific issues that occur between married individuals. To further understand the common issues that may occur amongst married individuals, three-hundred and fifty-five couples were assessed over a sixteen year period, on select years during a longitudinal study (Birditt, Wan, Orbuch, & Antonucci, 1995-2006).

The participants were from an Early Years of Marriage Project (EYM) that was started in 1986 (Birditt, Wan, Orbuch, & Antonucci, 1995-2006). The original EYM sample were those who had applied for a marriage license in Wayne County, Michigan from April through June 1986. During this longitudinal study, it was found that the negative aspects of the relationships were often related to marital longevity, along with psychological and physical well-being. These negative aspects appeared to conjure more of a harmful effect on the relationship than the positive aspects. Common emotions that were present during the negative aspects of the relationship were feelings of resentfulness and irritation that were often caused by disappointment, disagreements, and conflicts within the marriage. It was noted that while some couple's first instinct in an argument would be to yell, other couples are more prone to sitting down and talking things out rationally, however, they both may experience similarly high levels of marital tension. There are, of course, certain occurrences that may overtime, cause tension.

When it came to the destressing models, there was evidence supporting the idea that married couple's ability to resolve and overcome conflict played a great deal in the probability that their marriage outcome will be positive. Being in a married relationship for an exceptional period of time does effect this ability in a sense that both parties have more time to learn and adapt to their partners expectations (Birditt, Wan, Orbuch, & Antonucci, 1995-2006). In a twisted way, it is arguable that some conflicts have the potential of strengthening the relationship. With the information of wives being more likely to initiate divorce and use destructive conflict strategies in response to conflict and several other statistics, the longitudinal study was conducted and received results that were most accurate to their present study hypotheses.

SUMMARY

The need for family counseling is something that may never go away. Problems arise- often those that are out of our control. There have been many studies that were created to discover what the most common problems were and what can contribute to existing home issues. Many different forms of therapy have been used, such as medication therapy, marriage and family counseling therapy, behavioral management, family focused therapy, and surveys to determine self-reported statistics. All of which have their own individual pros and cons. Not to mention specific skill sets that are necessary for the mental health professional to have in order to obtain good progress and positive outcomes.

Of children with separated parents, it was no surprise that both parties played a very important role in how their child would respond to not only the divorce, but their being part as a whole. Parenting quality was shown to affect the child's externalizing and internalizing abilities (Hara, Sandler, Wolchik, Tein, & Rhodes, 2019). There was positive evidence that supported the idea that resilience was able to help families bounce back from traumatic incidents. However, trauma and stress can build over long periods of time and if unnoticed, can cause longer lasting issues (Berger, 2017).

When surveyed, over 65% of participants claimed to be married and 50% of the total number of participants claimed to have at least two children (Lara, 2020). After answering a few questions about home life, results showed that more than 30% of participants claimed to be slightly to not satisfied with their current relationship. Traumatic events also appeared to be very common amongst these families that very much could have been the cause of prolonged unhappiness. Sixty-five percent of these families reported having gone through a traumatic event. Thirty-five percent of these same individuals claimed their child(ren) experienced these events with them. The overall statistics of the survey results presented unusually large numbers of those who claimed to

experience less than desired emotions and experiences. Research also showed that within these homes, parents' abilities to face and overcome situations within their relationship, showed a promising increase in possibility of a positive marriage. It can be concluded that trauma, relationship struggles, family trauma, and personal psychological stressors can all play a large part in a long-lasting feeling of stress in a family home.

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