Grounded Theory Study of Family Happiness among People Who Live in Urban Community in Bangkok

Introduction

The UN surveyed happiness across countries and ranked the countries by the happiness index. According to the findings, Thailand ranked 36 among 156 countries (Helliwell & Wong, 2013). In Thailand, the average mean happiness was reported as moderate in the group aged 15 years and up and with the group aged 15-59 years being the happiest (Department of Mental Health, Thailand, 2014). Recent studies have found that spending time together and living with family members (Gray, Chamratrithirong, Pattaravanich & Prasartkul, 2013), caring for one another (Kramanon & Grey, 2015), good family relationships (Nanthamongkolchai, Tuntichaivanit, Munsawaengsub & Charupoonphol, 2009) and family satisfaction (Sesanu & Singhapakdi, 2014) can predict present and future family happiness. However, previous studies have also reported that family factors influence happiness, whereas little is known about how family interactions and dynamics are involved in family happiness.

Objective

To fill in the gap of knowledge, is aimed at exploring the family process of happiness in terms of family interactions and dynamics.

Methods

1. The participants were aged 18 years and up, had lived with family members for up to 1 year, spoke Thai, and did not present with severe physical and psychological problems and were asked for consent to participate in the research project.
2. The researchers selected the participants who were permanent and immigrant residents for the research project based on the theoretical sampling by the Strauss and Corbin Method.
3. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used to collect data and the interview questions were guided by the review of literature related to family happiness and the emerged concepts.
4. The Strauss and Corbin method was used to guide researchers to collect and analyze data; this process occurred mutually until data saturation.
5. The researchers read and reread the transcripts of the interviews until they understood what the participants had said. Then the open coding initially started line-by-line, after which the researchers read the coded data and grouped the content in the axial coding process. Finally, the groups of axial coding were analyzed to determining how they explained correlations among all coding in the sense of family happiness and selected coding emerged from all coding.
6. This study conducted researchers' triangulation, peer debriefing and member checking to gain trustworthiness.

Results

The 13 participants had middle class economic status as residents whose livelihoods consisted of street food vendors, motorcycle taxis, security guards, tailors, and housewives. The descriptions related to family happiness are presented below:

Q: What is family happiness?

P: "The financial security of a family is of primary importance in family happiness. It's very…very important; some family members argue with one another, couples fight with each other- whatever-because of money problems…family happiness depends on the security of family economy. Couples also need to talk to each other and consult each other. Lastly, family members need to be responsible for their jobs and refrain from involvement in gambling or drugs. This is family happiness from my point of view."

The participants described family happiness as depending on family financial status, communication and taking on roles as family members. In response to, *'How do family interactions with one another serve family happiness?'* the participant descriptions presented family happiness including the following three stages:

Stage I: Close connections can be defined as how families spend time together by having family dinners, short travelling together or visiting other relatives. They also made friendly talking and not making arguments.

P: "My family has three persons. We frequently travel together during traditional festivals such as New Year and Songkran (Thai New Year)."

P: "We don't have any arguments…we talk to each other in a friendly manner and dine together. This is happiness…this makes me happy"

Stage II: Caring for one another can be defined as how family members share their concern for one another by relieving physical and emotional strain. Additionally, the participant descriptions showed how family members created safe environments both inside and outside the family by teaching children to avoid drugs and building good relationships with neighbors.

P: '(My elder brother and sister) care for me…they don't leave me alone. So, I have to take care of my father instead of them. Anyway, they care for me, too. We care for one another.' (Participant who was taking care of her frail father)

P: 'Sometimes, when I go back to my hometown, I buy things to give to my neighbors. I always talk to them nicely…they always do the same. My neighbors are good people.'

Stage III: Family Financial Security can be defined as the financial status achieving necessary balance between daily expenses and income. They perceived that money problems caused family happiness to decrease. Most were focused on saving money and buying things reasonably. This led them to securing their money each month.

P: '(I)…keep thinking about how much money we have to pay for renting the house, daily expenses and… I have money plans for the future…and have changed my style into a disciplined person in terms of money management. Every day, I save about 100 baht. Although this is not a large amount of money, it helps build a savings for emergency use.

When asked to describe, *'What factors or situations influence family happiness'*, most of them expressed that marital conflict, poor family relationships and financial constraints decreased family happiness. These consequently affected the family caring, communication patterns or economic status. As a result, the family would have increased tension and decreased family happiness. However, they described ways to relieve tension as follows:

To cope with marital conflict or family members' arguments, the participants said:

P: '…Ploi wang (Thai proverb means lets it be)…don't think too much…no one can help us; we have to help ourselves first. I've been thinking this way'

On things that helped them take good care of one another, they also said:

P: 'We are family…so we don't leave anyone alone…I always consult my elder sister. This makes me feel close to her'.

On coping with financial constraints, they additionally expressed:

P: 'In my view, other family members can help me when I am in need…they give me money to buy things, so I don't face these problems for very long.'

Therefore, to formulate the hypothesized process of family happiness emerging from the descriptions above, the following figure is presented. The family happiness process consists of three stages and family happiness can be decreased and increased when family members are faced with stress. However, crises can be turned into happiness by coping.
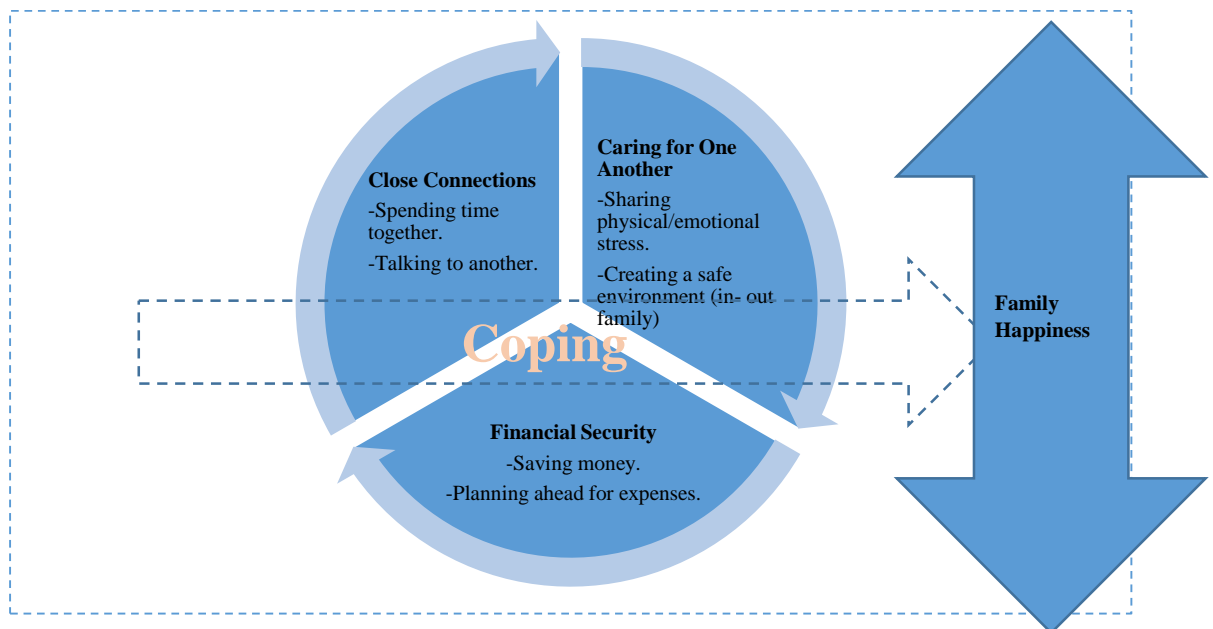
Discussion

The Thai participants in this study who lived in urban Bangkok described their happiness on the basis of the family happiness process comprising close connections, caring for one another and financial security. When family happiness was challenged by stress over time, the participants employed coping methods to alleviate the consequences of stress and restore happiness. Therefore, the hypothesized family happiness process represents the dynamics of families in resisting stress by using coping methods and maintaining family happiness. This indicates that the magnitude family happiness can be either decreased or increased based upon the coping methods used by the participants. Compared with recent studies (Lam, Fielding, McDowell, Johnson, Chan, & et al., 2012), the family happiness of Chinese people was found to be composed of the following four components: family harmony (a prerequisite for family happiness), caring and supportive attitudes and behaviors (family members act toward one another based on respect and caring), feeling secure versus togetherness (family financial security and a sense of community integration), and contentment (perceived sufficiency in life). This concept of family happiness reveals the components of

family happiness, but does not describe how families sustain their happiness. Therefore, this study explores the extent of family happiness from the latter model in terms of explanations of coping methods to sustain family happiness. In addition, the findings reveal that family happiness is a dynamic process in the face of stress over time.

Conclusion

The family happiness process consists of the following three stages: close connections, caring for one another and financial security. This model represents family happiness as a dynamic process with decreased and increased family happiness when faced with stress. Additionally, coping methods resist the consequences of stress and balance family happiness over time. These findings can inform health professionals to implement interventions such as family communication training, martial relationships or coping skills training to enhance family happiness.

Reference

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