

PILOT STUDY OF THE FAMILY RESILIENCE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FAMILIES AT RISK *

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BACKGROUND

- **Family resilience** concept is **new, under-researched process** that could be of importance for complex family interventions planning.
- The research problem of this study was „*What makes family at risk resilient?*”

MANY CHALLENGES in researching this topic:

- **difficulties in conceptualization and operationalization** of the concept of family resilience,
- **ethical issues** in family studies,
- family interview protocol **validation** and seeing family **interview** as a specific approach that goes beyond **method and** often includes **intervention**
- **family perspective/data?** (vs. individual perspectives)?

....

OBJECTIVES

- to get insight into family perception of their functioning
 - to find out how do families define resilient family and do they see themselves as resilient family
 - to check if the families are resilient
 - to get insight into circumstances that contributed to family resilience

 - check/ validate the interview protocol
 - get experience in leading the family interviews
- (+ how to code family data, family interview – a method or intervention?...)

METHODS

- **SEMI-STRUCTURED FAMILY GROUP INTERVIEWS** conducted in 2017 and 2018
- **PARTICIPANTS:**
 - families at risk from the City of Zagreb and the Zagreb County area included in intervention delivered by NGO Ambidekster, Psychiatric hospital for children and youth, Institutional risks/needs/strengths assessment DUE TO THEIR CHILD'S BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS
 - 5 families =22 members (+2- neighbour and a friend)
- **DATA ANALYSIS:** preliminary coding/ thematic analysis (250 pages; interview lasted 2.5-3 hours per family)

RESULTS

METAPHORS and ASSOCIATIONS for their family:

- Parent: Unfunctional family (due to ADHD), life with ADHD, You can't choose your family
- Family as „crab kids”, Family as number of individuals, Family who doesn't know how to cope
- Wounded family
- Brother/sister: Family as a burden (because of brother)
- Sad family
- CM: Crazy house but with funny members, Tiresome family
- Different family (because of the attachment and unity/being and staying together), Triller, Tragic comedy

Family resilience definition/associations/indicators:

- Attachment, connectedness, support, honesty, mutual trust, respect, mutual honest communication, cohesion, unity, harmony
- Family balancing through life
- „Being resilient means you stay together despite crisis and risks (falls)”
- „We are resilient coz everyone else would already burst, we got used to this and we always somehow manage to get out of the problem.”

RISKS (moderate to high risk families)

- **Behaviour problems** (criterion member): aggressive behavior in school and at home, ADHD, disrespect of authority, defiance, resistance, spite
- Puberty period as a risk(y) period/hard time for handling
- **Family**: marriage problems, divorce, financial problems, ineffective and inadequate communication...
- **Social and spatial isolation** (No peers for children; No interventions for ADHD near by/in local community...)

ACCUMULATED problems/risks

Last for long period (last 3/5/6...years)/**CHRONIC RISKS**

Many stressors in short period (death of two grandparents, parent's heart attack, divorce, moving...)

➤ Don't handle other children needs/problems due to occupation with child with BP

➤ Don't function competent though THEY're TRYing TO FULFIL FAMILY/PARENTAL TASKS

THE CURRENT BIGGEST PROBLEM

- THE BIGGEST PROBLEM: **behaviour problems/ child at risk** (“noone can help him”)

PERCEPTION OF THE PROBLEM

- Problem has a **huge impact on family members** (grandma/brothers/sisters unhappy, lost weight/health problems...)
- **(Symptom) children- aware that their problem** (or them) **affects the whole family** (they are the main problem)
- **Some family members see the child as the problem** (they don't have it)
- The **family (or members) has to change too**
- Personal problem always reflects and has influence on the family (**individual's problem is family's problem**)
- Some members aware of the **importance of collaborative conflict resolution and problem solving**

1. PROCESSES ON FAMILY LEVEL:

1.1. FAMILY FUNCTIONING

1.1.1. EVERYDAY FUNCTIONING:

- **No joint family activities** during the working days, **poor, rare family rituals and routines**
- **Rarely all family together/gathered-** family walking and cinema during the weekend, Sunday lunch as a tradition/ritual
- **More joint activities in the past** (or when children were little)

1.1.2. COPING STRATEGIES/RESOLVING PROBLEMS/FAMILY COMMUNICATION:

- **Depend on the problem/time** (sometimes they do, sometimes they don't, children not sure if they can...)

• **INEFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND UNFUNCTIONAL COPING STRATEGIES:**

- Withdrawal (of one or more members)
- Avoiding
- Isolation
- Anger toward each other
- Aggressive behaviour (circle of aggression), Shouting, Quarrels, Argues all the time,
- Blaming than isolation
- Weakness
- Crying
- Holding problems for themselves (avoiding talking about it)

- **FUNCTIONAL COPING STRATEGIES** (but on individual level and efforts),

in general **internal**:

- trying by themselves but with no effect,
- aware they don't know how to resolve problems,
- seek and want help (even from us)

- **NO FAMILY RESOLVING PROBLEMS STRATEGY**, don't talk openly about problems

- **IMPORTANT/HELPFUL IN COPING WITH PREVIOUS PROBLEMS:**

- Normalization** of big life event/stressor
- Believing again/restoring confidence in your own parental decisions**, style and methods
- Giving back the belief/**re-believing that one can solve problem**
- To **know you are not alone**/other have the same problems

1.1.3. **UNSATISFIED with the level of FAMILY COHESION** (though some seem to have potential for it or where more connected as a family in the past)

- Some **family members connected and attached to each other** (e.g. sister and older brother, Mum and younger daughter, parents show love and affections to all members...)

1.2. **FAMILY BELIEF SYSTEM**

belonging to the family and family unity despite crisis (within one family or from the perspective of specific member within family, not family as whole view)

➤ Mainly all members **UNSATISFIED WITH THE FAMILY LIFE**

(due to all negative family dynamics, processes, ill communication, no cohesion, no negotiation, only quarrels, bad relations, no honesty, no trust, don't solve problems...)

- **KEY FAMILY FIGURE** in families at risk

MUM

- Exhausted, Tired, Can't stand it anymore
- Overwhelmed
- Mum the one who gathers family, takes care of everything, works a lot
- Tries to solve problems
- Mum as the main support/backbone

(„I am a litter/rug/floorcluth...”)

STRENGTHS:

INDIVIDUAL

- criterion member's intellectual abilities,
- readiness for change,
- readiness for intervention,
- employed parent,
- younger daughter helps with house work,
- positive perspective, father's optimism/positive attitude, hope and belief that it will be better in the future,
- father's calmness during behaviour escalation,
- criterion member respects just authority,
- older brother/sister successful in school and independent/autonomous,
- warm and emotional daughter as a comfort, pet as a comfort,
- learning from past experiences,
- good will of a family member (influences on others)
- will to resolve problems

FAMILY:

- Housework division,
- Both parents involved in upbringing, interested and caring parents for children wellbeing and upbringing, parents understanding developmental needs of children,
- Mother proud of children,
- Healthy members,
- Respect of family member's right on privacy,
- Belief in pro-social norms and values, awareness that communication, collaboration and negotiation are important

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

- Social support from nonfamily members (school, professionals, other parent's with similar problems/group support)
- Positive experience with professionals (earlier interventions); Professional's recognition for upbringing methods/parenting style
- Having friends outside family you can talk to/Person of trust

READINESS TO CHANGE (protective factors)

- Criterion member perception of the importance of the problem
- Member believes he can change (but thinks the family has to change too)
- Doesn't have intention to change
- Doesn't have capacity to make a change

FAMILIES READINESS FOR CHANGE (protective factors)

- Parents support family member with problem, believe that change can happen; wish for a happy and connected family;
- Parents have knowledge on ADHD and adequate reactions to it aware of the importance of family quality communication, mutual respect and cohesion
- Brothers/sisters fed up and don't want to change (not supportive)/they don't have to change (but they want change though some believe it is impossible for his/her brother to change; occupied with their own needs/problems

READINESS FOR INTERVENTION (protective factors)

- **INTERVENTIONS: so far MANY** (CSW, dance therapy, ADHD workshops, NGO counselling and parental support, home visits and support, speech pathologist, institutional assessment, half day treatment...)
- Some **assessed effective** by the child and or/family
- Parents **seek for help on many different places/persons** on their own
- **NOW:** home support and intervention, class assistant for ADHD, support group for parents...
- **Parents** (Mums in particular) **motivated to seek help, want help, ask for help**, ready to participate in intervention (parents and criterion members; brothers/sisters less)
- Criterion member has positive perception of (some) prior interventions; wants to participate in new intervention (regarding school)
- **WHAT HELPS OR WOULD HELP:** family therapy, ventilation of emotions with other parents, home visits and support/interventions, class assistant, medications (for ADHD)...

CONCLUSION

RESILIENCE CRITERION (Masten, 2016):

- Situation of significant difficulties/risks/stressors which threaten functioning, wellbeing or positive adaptation
- Presence of resources which facilitate coping with difficulties or adaptation
- Successful adaptation to new situation or avoiding negative outcome

= NOT RESILIENT FAMILIES AT THE MOMENT

Reflections on Conducting Family Group Interviews

- **Eliciting** children's (or **silent**) voices
- **Relationships in action**
- ✓ Participants' interactions in the family interviews also sometimes suggested the **existence of tensions** in relation to events and relationships within their family
- ✓ Accusations and scapegoating of several family members
- ✓ First family conversation

Managing the group dynamics - significant challenge of facilitating the family group interviews, as **family life did not stop when the interview began**

(> Levels of coding:

Relationships

Individual data

Family data...)

- **Analysing the perspectives of multiple family members is a complex task** (Ribbens McCarthy, Holland, & Gillies, 2003)
- One of the key analytic challenges we faced was **making sense of contradictions and changes across individual and group accounts**, and between family members.
- While we did not systematically record non-verbal interactions, **field notes** were very useful in offering additional data through which to make sense of the families' accounts.

- Family group interviews are “a successful method for observing and recording patterns of control and negotiation during the conversation” (Holland et al., 1996, p. 14).
- Findings revealed that gathering families together, during the ongoing crisis, could be both **beneficial (but also a threat/unhelpful)** for them as it opens the door to dialogues that can have a therapeutic effect on the family and help them manage the hard experience.

(Sensitive topic/sensitive population)

(Informing the participants about the possibilities of additional support)

(Closure/exit strategy)

Methodological and ethical issues

Some of the questions:

- Given the nature of a crisis time for families (at high risk), can they be interviewed during this time and assessed for family resilience?
- Should they be interviewed during this difficult time?
- Would it be possible during a family interview to attend to the whole family while recognizing individual family member's issues that might emerge?
- What might be the outcomes of a family interview?
- How would participation in a family interview affect the family? Would it enhance family connection or family tension?
- Would a family interview actually yield family level data that would contribute to greater understanding of the family experience as a whole?

Family data- future analysing and coding (Family patterns and themes)

Select phrases and sentences that answer the questions:

- ‘Why are these meaningful in the investigation of the family experience?’;
- ‘Does this phrase describe family level data and does it further understanding of the family experience?’
- ‘Do these data describe an individual perception of a family member that contributes to understanding the shared family experience?’

- In short:

Family interviews **provide rich data that contribute to knowledge and family needs, functioning etc.**

Families **want to tell their stories and have their voices heard**

Family interviews encourage catharsis and could/can increase selfawareness and empowerment of the **family (intervention not (only) a method!)**

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION! 😊



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