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Research Article

The Role of Personality Characteristics in Differentiating Different Family Types

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ABSTRACT

The current study has investigated differences among different family types based on family process and content model considering personality characteristics. 147 married men and women were asked to answer items of family content and process scales and short version of NEO's personality inventory. Data was analyzed by multivariate analysis of Variance method. Findings showed that there were significant differences among different family types in terms of their personality characteristics, except for Openness to experience. Healthy families reported higher Extraversion, Conscientiousness, and Agreeablenessand lower ones in Neuroticism compared to unhealthy and problematic families. Also, problematic families reported higher Extraversion, Conscientiousness, and Agreeableness and lower Neuroticism in comparison with unhealthy families.

Keywords: Family types, Family content and process model, personality characteristics

INTRODUCTION

Family is an important component of the society and one of the most natural groups that can meet one's material, emotional, developmental and spiritual needs. However, marital life is always at risk; numerous problems might break up the family. According to Golmann's study, in 1890 about 10% of married couples divorced, but the divorce probability of the young couples starting their marital life in 1990, increased by 67%. Suprisingly, Iran is ranked forth regarding divorce rate [10]. Therefore, identifying problematic factors affecting marital life is necessary for our society.

Investigating the nature of family system results in a better understanding of harmful changes occurring in the system [20]. Therefore, the family as the most important human system has attracted researchers and theoretician. In this regard, there are numerous theories explaining family functions and types such as systemic theory, exchange theory, conflict theory, functionalism-structuralism theory, and symbolic theory. One of the most important theories is family system theory that considers the family as a system in which every part affects and is affected by the other parts [6]. Based on this theory, Samani [16] defines the family as a dynamic system includes both a number of elements with specific relations-who distinguishes this model system from other proposed systems- and a set of particular outcomes related to a certain context and given social conventions. Numerous systematic models regarding the family and its dynamic have been proposed. One of the most comprehensive models proposed recently is Samani's [16] family process and content model. This model has been designed based on family conflict theories. Generally, theoretical family models based on family conflict theories identify the factors leading to marital and family conflicts.

Based on process-content model (PCM), the family as a system consists of three main dimensions: 1) Family processes which refers to actions that help the family adjust to new conditions and needs. Communication skills, decision making, problem solving, coping, Openness to experience, religious beliefs, perspective taking , tolerance and leadership skills used by the family members to face with social, cognitive and affective events, are all examples of the above mentioned actions. 2) Family content which refers to the family members' judgments of the quality of their health (physical and mental), job, income, financial afford, education level, place of residency, life facilities, race, etc. 3) Family Social context which represents the values and beliefs systems and the cultural environment accepted by the family. According to PMC three

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types of family can be identified: 1- healthy family that has a good quality regarding both process and content, 2- unhealthy family that doesn't have good content and process in managing situations, and 3) problematic family that is good at one of the two dimensions.

One of the advantages of the family process and content model is that it considers many factors simultaneously and presents strategies to cope with obstacles which cause lack of satisfaction, instability, and finally family break up.

Based on this model, healthy, unhealthy, and problematic families are differentiated. The question is that what are the factors effective in forming these types of families? Many inter-personal and intrapersonal factors have been mentioned; one of them is personality characteristics. There is a general agreement regarding the important role of personality characteristics in positive or negative quality of marital life [8]. Therefore, one's reaction to different situations can be predicted based on his/her personality. One's personality causes certain and different reactions on the part of the spouse, effects on the process of the relationship between them and finally effects on their marital satisfaction.

Many studies with different objectives have been done on personality characteristics and marital life. Some of them roughly support the hypothesis that the spouse's personality has an important role in the family's efficiency. For instance, Moeen *et al'* study shows that the individual's personality characteristics have an important role in his/her marital life. Also the study by Malof *et al.*, [11] shows that the four personality characteristics: low neuroticism, high Agreeableness, high Conscientiousness, and high Extraversion, have significant correlations with marital satisfaction while neuroticism has negative correlation with marital adjustment. Moreover, Abdollahzade & Garoosifarsh [3] found a significant correlation among the following personality characteristics: Extraversion, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness and a negative correlation between neuroticism and marital life satisfaction. But no significant correlation was found between Openness to experience and marital life satisfaction. These studies show the relationship between personality characteristics with marital satisfaction, marital adjustment, and the quality of marital life. However, no study was found to directly investigate the role of couples' personality characteristics in forming family type. Therefore, to have a better understanding of the effect of the couples' personality characteristics on forming family type, the present study was designed based on PMC. Considering theoretical views and the related studies, it is expected that positive personality characteristics to create a healthier family life, while negative ones to be found in unhealthy and problematic families.

Method:

Participants:

The sample included 147 married personnel from different organizations in a small size town in Iran. Their mean age was 34.03 years (SD= 10.08).

Measures:
Family content scale:

To measure family content, Samani's [14] self-report scale was used. It consists of 38 items rated on a 5-point scale from 1: strongly disagree to 5: strongly agree. This scale measures financial resources, educational facilities, physical appearances, occupational satisfaction, social prestige, place of living, times for being together, and physical and mental health. Samani and Sadeghzadeh [15] reported good validity and reliability for the scale using factor analysis, Cronbach alpha and test-retest methods, respectively.

Family process scale:

The scale consists of 42 items designed by Samani [14] to measure family process. It has 5 subscales including decision making and problem solving skills, coherence and reciprocal respect, coping skills, communication skills, and religious beliefs. Samani [14] using factorial analysis, test-retest and α's cronbach methods reported good validity and reliability for the scale.

NEO's personality inventory:

This inventory is designed by Costa and completed by Mecrae. It consists of two forms: a long and a short one. The short form includes 60 questions measuring the five following factors: Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Openness to experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. Garoosi using the correlation of the two personal and observer forms reported the criterion validity of the test to be 45%- 66%. Also using Cronbach alpha the coefficient correlations were 56%-87%.

Formatting of family typology:

To test the hypothesis, participants were separated into healthy, problematic (process and content types), and unhealthy families upon their scores on family process and content scales using a standard deviation above and below the median of the sample split as follow: families obtaining scores equal to or higher than 3 from the family content and process scales were classified as healthy families; families obtaining scores equal to 3 from the two scales were classified as unhealthy families; families with scores equal to or higher than 3 from the family process scale and scores less than 3 from the family content scale were classified as content problematic families ; and finally families with scores less than 3 from the family process scale and scores equal to or more than 3 from the family content scale were classified as process problematic families.

For NEO's personality inventory measure multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) method and post-hoc analysis were conducted to compare four groups.

Results:

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of personality characteristics in different family groups.

Table 1: The mean and standard deviation of personality characteristics in different family groups.

groups	Neuroticism	Extraversion	Openness to experience	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness
Healthy	18/96 (6/56)	26/38 (4/42)	10/46 (2/40)	16/32 (4/46)	36/28 (6/49)
Unhealthy	26/30 (7/25)	21/83 (4/79)	10/06 (2/54)	30/69 (7/68)	81/21 (8/46)
Process problematic	21/96 (5/62)	24/26 (4/34)	9/56 (2/92)	30/22 (2/92)	34/64 (7/15)
Content problematic	22/32 (5/02)	25/52 (4/12)	10/56 (2/58)	30/04 (4/36)	36/08 (5/37)

To clarify the differences among family types regarding the personality characteristic a multivariate analysis of variance was performed for different types of families. Findings of this analysis were significant for four dimensions (Neuroticism: $F_{(3, 138)}$ =9.7, P<0.001; Extraversion: $F_{(3, 138)}$ = 9.6, P<0.001; Agreeableness $F_{(3,138)}$ =6.1, P<0.001; and Conscientiousness: $F_{(3,138)}$ = 5.7, P<0.001). Result for openness to experience was non-significant, $F_{(3,138)}$ = .9, p < .4. The univariate ANOVA follow-ups and the Tukey post hoc tests were also performed for the final pursuit of differences. Findings of All four univariate ANOVA tests were significant (Neuroticism: $F_{(3, 139)}$ =10.15, P<0.001; Extraversion: $F_{(3, 142)}$ = 8.8, P<0.001; Agreeableness $F_{(3,142)}$ =6.7, P<0.001; and Conscientiousness: $F_{(3,141)}$ = 6.21, P<0.001). Table 2 shows significant findings of the post hoc tests performed on the personality characteristics.

Table 2: Significant findings on the personality characteristics.

variable	groups		Mean differences	Std.error	Sig.
Neuroticism	healthy	Unhealthy	-7.34	1.33	0.001
Extraversion	healthy	Unhealthy	4.55	0.91	0.001
	Process problematic	unhealthy	3.70	1.11	0.006
Agreeableness	healthy	unhealthy	4	0.89	0.001
Conscientiousness	healthy	unhealthy	5.59	1.40	0.001
	Content problematic	unhealthy	5.38	1.70	0.01

Post hoc analyses indicated that the healthy families reported higher Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness than unhealthy families. In addition, process and content problematic families reported higher Extraversion and Conscientiousness comparison with unhealthy families, respectively.

Discussion:

The present study aimed at investigating the differences among various family types (healthy, unhealthy, and problematic families) based on personality characteristics. Data analysis showed that there were significant differences among different family types (except for Openness to experience).

The results show that healthy families and content problematic families scored higher in Conscientiousness. In this regard, Samani's study showed that families with high process and content quality had more effective performance and psychological outcomes compared with other families. Higher scores in Conscientiousness correlate with achievement striving, dutifulness, deliberation and self-discipline. All these characteristics help the family feel secure. In such an atmosphere, there is hope for the couples to try to have long-lasting and positive marital relationship [5].

Other findings of the study showed that unhealthy families scored higher in Neuroticism compared with healthy and problematic families. These findings similar to those of Maloof *et al* [11] and Periohood *et al* [13] show that high score in Neuroticism is correlated with emotional instability and those with high scores in this characteristic have more tendency to impulsiveness, aggressiveness, and vulnerability. These characteristics affect the relationship between spouse and result in marital dissatisfaction.

Regarding Extraversion, the findings showed that healthy and content problematic families scored lower compared with unhealthy families. Extraverts have more tendencies to external world, prefer accompanying others, and are courageous, adventurous, and aspired for excitement and enjoy parties and have numerous friends. Also extraverts have interesting and unique personalities and they do not bore their spouses [1]. A combination of these factors leads to a better marital satisfaction and gives the edge for a healthier family. Consistent with these

findings, Maloof *et al* [11], Perihood *et al* [13], and Kordek [8] also found that Extraversion is an important and effective factor in marital adjustment. Other findings of the study showed that healthy families acquired significantly higher scores in Agreeableness, compared with unhealthy families. The study by Vandern *et al* [21] shows that Agreeableness has a positive effect on life quality. Tendermindedness, modesty, compliance, trust, straightforwardness, and altruism are characteristics of agreeable individuals. According to, these characteristics result in a better adjustment to the environment and others, especially the spouse. Similarly, Aliabadi and Pirastemotlagh [2] found that this aspect of personality is an important factor in maintaining the family. Moreover, Vandern *et al* [21] found that Agreeableness has a determining role in the quality of marital life.

Also the findings show that there is no significant difference in Openness to experience among the four family types. These findings are consistent with those of Abdollahzade [3] which show that there is no correlation between Openness to experience and marital satisfaction.

In explaining this hypothesis, it should be pointed out that these participants had routine jobs and it seems that they felt no need to desire for new experiences and ideas [17].

Acknowledgment

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