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A Model of Family Functioning Based on Cohesion, Flexibility and Communication across Family Life Cycle in Married Women

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The purpose of this research was to investigate the relationship between family dynamics (cohesion, flexibility and communication) and family functioning in family life cycles. The sample was selected by stratified random sampling from 500 Iranian married women. To collect data FACES IV family function scale (McMaster, 1983) was used. Using structural equation modeling, the findings of this study provided an acceptable representation of the relationships between the variables. The findings also revealed that family flexibility had a greater impact on changes in family functioning than family cohesion. Also the results of bootstrap showed directly effect of family communication on family functioning was not significant but indirect effect was significant. Other findings showed the contribution of enmeshment on family cohesion and the contribution of rigid on family flexibility was very low. However, comparison of models showed that different levels of cohesion and flexibility were different in stages of family life cycle. These findings can be helpful for family professionals to better understand family functioning.

Keywords: family cohesion, family flexibility, family communication, family function, family life cycle

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A family may be viewed more broadly as a group of people with a past history, a present reality, and a future expectation of interconnected mutually influencing relationships (Galvin, Braithwaite, & Bylund, 2015). Many theorists and researchers engaged in the study of the family, observed the values, social norms, and behaviors that affect family structures have changed during the past two decades. It seems that the families of the twenty-first century have encountered new challenges that threaten the quality of family functioning and family structure (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002; Philbrick, 2007). Changes in family structure with the formation of blended families and single parents, along with more working mothers, have created new alignments of responsibilities, family roles, and time to spent together (Doherty, 1999). Some of the major causes for change are universal, while there are other countries and cultures who have met specific changes. Based on the Bowen's family theory (1978), the family is composed of complex units bonded by strong emotional connections. Traditions, communication styles, behavioral patterns and emotional interdependence, all have influence on the dynamics between family members. These dynamics can lead to healthy or unhealthy family functioning. Therefore, the ability of family members for healthy functioning depends on their dynamics such as resolving problems effectively, distribution of roles, showing interest to each other, and controlling their behaviors (Epstein, Bishop, & Levin, 1978).

As the results, families form a highly interdependent unit, and the behavior of one member of the family has an inherent effect on the whole system (Bitter, 2009). Families face changes over time which in turn creates changes in the couple and family type. According to Olson (2000), families can move in any direction depending on the situation, stage of the family life cycle or

socialization of family members. Usually, family systems will change at different stages of the family life cycle and the direction of these changes (positive or negative), depends on the quality of family dynamics (Price, Price, & McKenry, 2009).

To study the family systems, different approaches have been used. For instance, several researchers have suggested the need for intervention methods to study family patterns (Kitzmann, Dalton III, & Buscemi, 2008; Proulx & Snyder, 2009). One of the intervention models which assesses the family dynamics is the Circumplex Model.

The Circumplex model of marital and family systems is anchored in family systems theory. This model illustrates the reactions and adaptations of families to the stressors they experience as they develop. The model represents the interaction of dimensions of cohesion (emotional bonding) and flexibility (stability of a system). It is important to mention that a system is not fixed in a static point and families constantly adjust. The original Circumplex Model, as it applies to family systems is attributed to the work of Olson (Gerhardt, 2016).

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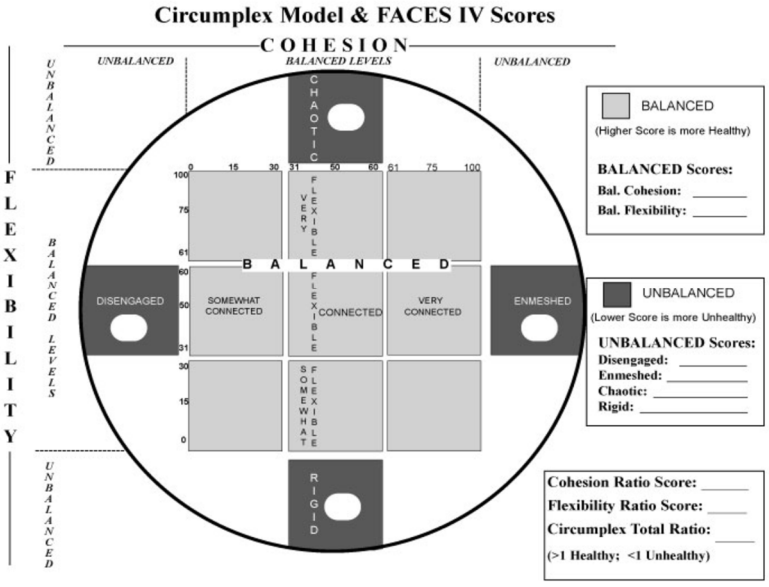

Figure 1. FACES IV & the Circumplex Model (Olson, Gorall, & Tiesel, 2006)

This model emerged from a conceptual clustering of over fifty concepts developed to describe marital and family dynamics (Olsen et al., 1983; Olson & Gorall, 2003). The graphic representation of the model emphasizes the interconnection of family members and their behavioral quality. The Circumplex Model is built on three dimensions; cohesion, flexibility, and communication. The last dimension, communication, facilitates movement in a family between the other two dimensions. Therefore, if a couple or a family has good communication skills, they are more likely to have closeness (cohesion dimension) and to be able to work out problems (flexibility dimension) when they arise (Olson & Gorall, 2003).

Cohesion and flexibility are effective resources that help families in managing stress, increase productivity and

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satisfaction. Families, and couples with a balanced level of cohesion and flexibility, are better equipped to deal with different stresses in stages of family life cycle and are happier. Consequently, balanced couples and families will be generally functioning more adequately than unbalanced couples and families. For instance Coe, Davies, and Sturge-Apple (2018) indicated that family cohesion and enmeshment moderated associations between maternal relationship instability and increases in children's externalizing problems .

However, there is a large and growing body of literature that investigated the important role of cultural differences in the patterns of marital and family relationships. Overall, gender role norms, family roles, and the structure of family decision are affected by ethnic and cultural groups (Elliott & Gray, 2000; Rothbaum, Rosen, Ujiie, & Uchida, 2002).

One of the barriers in the effectiveness of family counseling and family therapy is models and evaluation techniques of family dynamics and systems that are inappropriate for the clients' culture (Collins, Arthur, & Wong-Wylie, 2010; Sue & Sue, 2008). Since cultural values are unique in every society and ethnicity has a great influence on how a family functions, it is essential to consider cultural factors in the assessment of family dynamics (Sue & Sue, 2008).

Unfortunately, there has been little attention paid to the family structure patterns in the Iranian culture. This study will show how family cohesion, family flexibility and family communication as family dynamics are related to family functioning and how family life cycle affects this relationship in Iranian married women. There are two objectives to follow in this study.

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- To determine the impact of the family dynamics (cohesion, flexibility, communication) in predicting the family function.
- To determine the relationship between the family dynamics and the family functioning with the moderating role of the family life cycle.

Method

Participants

The population of this study is married Iranian women, who live in Iran (Tehran) in different stages of family life cycle. Therefore, six smaller groups are known as strata. The strata in this research are formed based on the length of marriage.

Based on the distribution of population in each stage of family life cycle, the participants were selected between 20 and 70 years' old who have been together at least for six months in each stage of family life cycle.

These stages consist of: the formation stage (couples without children), the expansion stage 1 (the age of the first child is less than 2 years), the expansion stage 2 (the age of the first child is between 2 and 12 years), the expansion stage 3 (the age of the first child is more than 12 years), the contraction stage (families having young adults) and the post parental stage (family in later life).

This study applied the stratified sampling method for two reasons: First, since the researcher wants to highlight the specific subgroups within the study. And second, to observe the relationships or differences between subgroups (six stages of family life cycle).

To determining the sample size of the study, the SEM is uses (usually N>200). The sample size also depends on the model

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complexity, the estimation method used, and the distributional characteristics of observed variables (Kline, 2010). A sample size of 200 or even much larger may be necessary for a very complicated path model. Furthermore, some researcher such as Sivo, et al. 2006; Garver and Mentzer (1999); and Hoelter (1983) proposed a 'critical sample size' of 200 (Kline, 2010). Finally based on data analysis method in this research, 525 married women by stratified randomly were selected, who were living together at least six months in each stage of family life cycle. They lived in Tehran as a capital of Iran and they were between the ages of 20-70 years old.

Instruments

The survey questionnaire used in this study included three parts. The first part of the questionnaire contains demographic questions such as gender, age, educational level, married age, and number of children, age of children and stage of life. And the second part includes Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales (FACES IV Package). FACES IV is based on the Circumplex Model with the multidimensional approach offers a method for measuring family dynamics. Olson (2011) indicates that the FACES IV is a major revision of the previous Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales (FACES I, II, and III).

FACES IV contains two balanced scales that measure balanced family flexibility and balanced family cohesion. Four unbalanced scales measure the low and high extremes of flexibility and cohesion (enmeshment, disengaged, chaotic and rigid). In addition, family satisfaction and family communication scales are in the package too (Olson, 2011) . FACES IV has convenient internal consistency (Koutra, Triliva, Roumeliotaki,

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Lionis, & Vgontzas, 2012; Olson, 2011; Rada, 2018), predictive validity and construct validity (Olson, 2007, 2011; Shek, 2001; Turkdogan, Duru, & Balkis, 2018).

The General Family Functioning scale based on McMaster model, assesses the overall health/pathology of the family. The subscale has been to have a linear relationship to family functioning. Epstein, Baldwin, and Bishop (1983), Tutty (1995) and Shek (2002) confirmed its psychometric properties.

The primary stage of data analysis was to gain an understanding about the participants' characteristics. Frequency distributions are generated from all classification variables in this section. The classification variables are: Age, Education level, Married duration, and stages of family life cycle. The total of 525 married couples participated in the study. The largest age groups of the participants were in 20-25 years' group (23%) which comprises about one quarter of the participants. The next largest group was 26- 30 years (17.1%), 31-35 years (14.1%), 36-40 years (13.1%), 41-45 years (9.7%), 46-50 years (5.3%), 51- 55 years (3.8%), 56-60 years (3.2%), 61-65 (2.7%), more than 66 (8.0%). The education level of participants can be divided into 4 significant groups which are: participants with Diploma level of education which formed the largest group (71%) and those with Bachelor (17.9%) and Master level (5.9%) and finally PhD level (5%).

The participants also were required to provide information concerning their length of married. The analysis indicates that more than 11.4% of the participants had less than 2 years of married experience, 16.4% had 2-5 years, 20.4% were 6-10 years, 13.3% were 11-15 years, 9.1% were 16-20 years, 9.5% were 21-25 years, 9% were 26-30 years, 10.9% more than 30 years of married age. The analysis showed that the majority of them (33%)

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had just one child. In the last question of the demographic section, the participants were asked to indicate their stages of family life cycle. The result indicated the most of the participants (29%) were in the third stage of family life cycle (the age of first child was between 2 -12 years), (23%) were in fourth stages (the age of the first child of the family was more than 12 years), (17%) were in the first stage (couples without children), (12%) were in second stage (the age of first child was under 2 years), (11%) were in fifth stage (family lunching) and (8%) were in the last stage (post parental). The frequencies of participants in various classification variables for this sample are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1
Frequencies Distribution-Classification Variables

Demography	Details	Frequency	Percentage
Age	20-25 years	120	22.9
	26-30 years	90	17.1
	31-35 years	74	14.1
	36-40 years	69	13.1
	41-45 years	51	9.7
	46-50 years	28	5.3
	51-55 years	20	3.8
	56-60 years	17	3.2
	61-65 years	14	2.7
	More than 66 years	42	8.0
Education	Diploma	374	71.2
	Bachelor	94	17.9
	Master	31	5.9
	PhD	26	5.0

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Married Duration	Less than 2 years	60	11.4
	2-5 years	86	16.4
	6-10 years	107	20.4
	11-15 years	70	13.3
	16-20 years	48	9.1
	21-25 years	50	9.5
	26-30 years	47	9.0
	More than 30 years	57	10.9
Stages of Family Life Cycle	Married, without children	90	17.1
	First child under 2 years	61	11.8
	First child 2-12 years	153	29.2
	First child more than 12 years	120	22.9
	Family Lunching	61	11.4
	Post parental	40	7.6

Structural equation modeling was used to examine each of the two research hypotheses, separately. Data were screened and were found to display univariate normality. Structural equation modeling allowed for the simultaneous testing of the relationships in variables of interest specified by the hypothesized models, while controlling for correlations in the variables (Lutgendorf, Russell, Ullrich, Harris, & Wallace, 2004).

To interpret the causal paths of the structural model, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate the nature of and relations in latent constructs. CFA is a part of the larger family of methods known as structural equation modeling (SEM) and plays an essential role in measurement model

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validation in path or structural analyses (MacCallum & Austin, 2000).

Results

The goodness of fit statistic values of the measurement models indicated the values in the modification models of CFA were acceptable for good model fit. Also, all parameter estimates in these measurement models were significant ($p < .01$). Thus, it is concluded that all models were fit well and represented a reasonably close approximation to the population. (See Table 2).

Table 2
Goodness of Fit Indices for the Measurement Models

Model	Chi-square	Df	P	CFI	Cmin /df	RMSEA	IFI
Family Cohesion	489.346	143	.000	.911	3.401	.068	.912
Family Flexibility	496.545	138	.000	.910	3.598	.070	.911
Family Communication	70.81	32	.000	.983	2.213	.048	.983
Family Function	615.629	208	.000	.932	2.960	.061	.933

Consequently, Structural Equation Model (SEM) was used to evaluate the relationship between the theoretical constructs (Hair, Black, Babin. BJ, & Anderson, 2010). The parceling model based on Russell, Kahn, Spoth, and Altmaier (1998) which suggested rank order items on the basis of their factor loadings, and assign items to parcels so as to equate the average loadings of each parcel of items on the factor. Consequently, the model presented in Figure 1 incorporates relations between family cohesion, family flexibility and family communication as exogenous variables and

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family functioning (family satisfaction, general function) as the endogenous variables.

Model fit was examined using the chi -square, the comparative fit index (CFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) in accordance with the guidelines put in Hair et al. (2010). Modification indices indicated that the model provided an adequate fit. The maximum likelihood estimation of the model supported the adequacy of the SEM model. The overall fit of the model was: Chi-square = 255.393, p = .000; cmin/df= 2.746, CFI =. 967, IFI = .967 and RMSEA = .058. It was concluded that the model in Figure 1 provided an acceptable representation of the relations between the variables. The results of model fit showed in Table 3.

Table 3

Goodness of fit Indices of Structural Model

Model	Chi-square	df	P	CFI	cmin/df	RMSEA	IFI
	255.393	93	.000	.967	2.746	.058	.967

In order to reach the major purpose of this study a comparison was made of the relationship between family dynamic dimensions and family function patterns across family life cycle.

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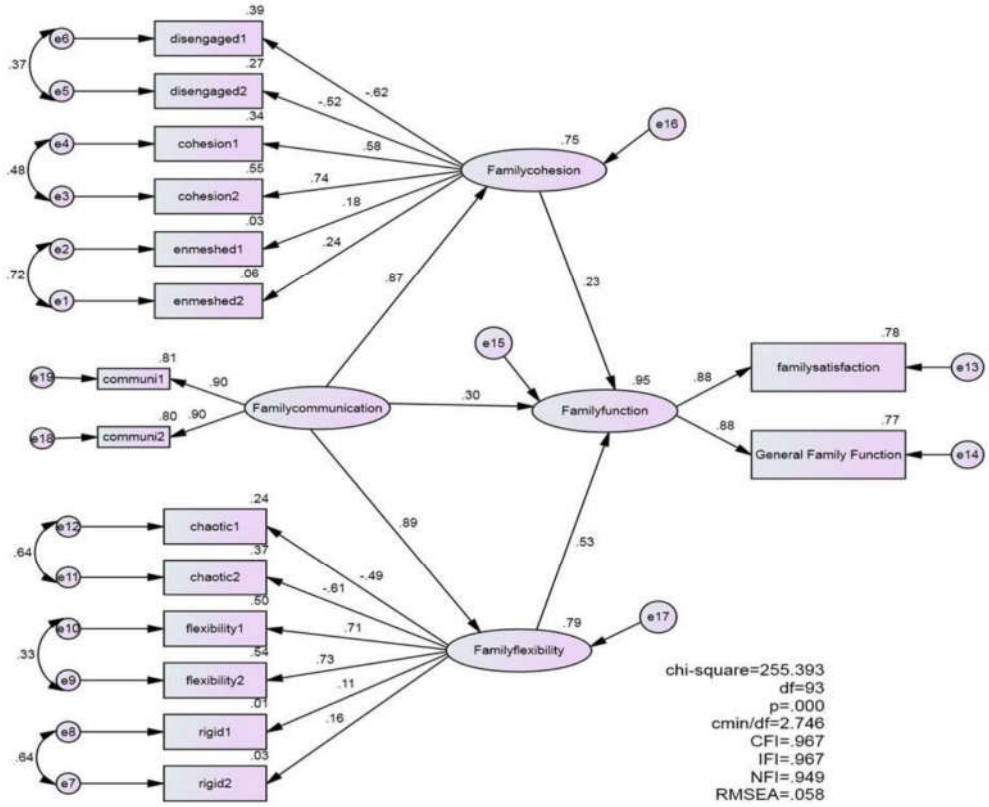

Figure 2. Structural equation modeling with family cohesion, family flexibility, family communication & family function

Additionally, the results supported the significant relationship of the structural paths between exogenous and endogenous variables. Family cohesion significantly predicted positive family functioning (ß= .23, CR= 1.99, P< .05). Also, family flexibility significantly positively predicted family functioning (ß= .53, CR= 2.53, P< .05) in Iranian couples. The significant relationship between family communication and family cohesion was confirmed (ß= .87, CR= 4.96, P< .001). The results also support the relationship between family communication and family

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flexibility (ß= .89, CR= 3.45, P< .001). The family communication was not significantly associated with family dynamics (β=.30, CR= 1.82, P> .05). As the result, communication didn't have a direct effect on family functioning.

The results of bootstrap method were used to test the significance of the mediation relationship between variables. In other word indirect paths of family communication with family function are significant. The confidence level for the confidence interval, 95 and the bootstrap sampling rate is 1000. The results showed in Table 4.

Table 4
Standardized Estimate Effects and Two Tailed Significance

Verbal's	Total effect	Direct effect	Indirect effect
Family communication –>family function	.940 (.001)	.302 (.246)	.637 (.002)

Also, to investigate the relationship between family dynamics and family functioning with moderating role of family life cycle, to conduct moderating multi-group in order to examine the effect of family life cycle for construct comparability as well as to detect possible between-group differences. It needed to conduct moderating multi-group in order to examine the effect of family life cycle for construct comparability as well as to detect possible between-group differences (Little, 1997). Overall, the moderator is a variable that tells for whom and at what level the effect of the predictor variable is having on the criterion variable (Frazier, Tix, & Barron, 2004).

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The general procedure in multiple group analysis is to test measurement invariance between the unconstrained models for all groups combined, then for a model with constrained parameters (parameters are constrained to be equal between the groups). If the chi-square difference statistic is not significant between the original and constrained models, then we conclude that the model has measurement invariance across groups (Byrne, 2010).

On the other hand, the most of applied researchers believed the χ^2 difference test represents an excessively stringent test of invariance and particularly in light of the fact that SEM models at best are only approximations of reality (Cudeck & Browne, 1983). Consistent with this perspective, Cheung and Rensvold (2002); Chen (2007) argued that it may be more reasonable to base invariance decisions on a difference in CFI ($\Delta CFI \leq .01$) and RMSEA ($\Delta RMSEA \leq .015$) rather than on χ^2 values; Since they are independent of model complexity and sample size. Therefore, the researcher examined the χ^2 difference and CFI difference and RMSEA differences in this study.

The researcher used the multi group moderation that determined if the relationships hypothesized in a model was different based on the value of the moderator (six stages of family life cycle). Analysis of different groups of samples was carried out to test, goodness of fit, and the data that best fits the model used in the analysis. The findings showed that moderating effect of family life cycle about the relationship between family dynamics and family function was good. The results of multiple group modeling for family life cycle invariant showed that there were significant differences of Chi-square ($\Delta\chi2=260.449$; $p< .001$). Also, significant differences of CFI between the two models was ($\Delta CFI = .012$). As Cheung and Rensvold (2002)

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pointed out the hypothesis of invariant path coefficients across two groups would be rejected if at least two of the following criteria were satisfied: $\Delta\chi^2$ significant at $p < .05$; $\Delta RMSEA \geq .015$ and $\Delta CFI \geq .01$. Therefore, due to results of $\Delta\chi^2$ and ΔCFI, the uniqueness invariance did not hold across the sample groups. The results illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5

Summary of Good Fitness in Multiple Group based on Life Cycle

Model	CMIN	Df	P	cmin /df	CFI	RMSEA
Unconstrained	985.813	558	.000	1.767	.920	.043
Fully Unconstrained	1246.262	643	.000	1.938	.908	.038
Differences	260.449	85	.000	.171	.012	.005

In other words, there was a significant difference between the unconstrained model and the fully constrained model. The uniqueness invariance did not hold across the sample groups. Therefore, the results showed that the relationship between family dynamics and family function had significant differences across the six stages of life cycle.

Discussion

In this study, the structural equation modeling of family structure patterns in this study provided an acceptable representation of the relationships between the variables. The study found that changes in family flexibility (ß= .53) had the greater effect on changes in family functioning than family cohesion (ß= .23). In other words, family flexibility had more influence than emotional closeness in

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family functioning in Iranian couples. This results confirmed the studies of Mathis and Tanner (1991); James and Hunsley (1995) who suggested the flexibility is likely more important than cohesion in predicting marital stability and satisfaction in couples. Also Tsabari and Lavee (2012) suggested that in treating troubled families, change in cohesion may be more difficult to achieve than change in flexibility, and advised therapists to work on changing the latter dimension first to reach the desired goals.

These findings further support the idea of McFarlane, Bellissimo, and Norman (1995) who examined the effects of cohesion and adaptability on family members' psychological functioning, behavior, and perceptions of family relationships. Their research illustrated that cohesion had a direct linear relationship to positive outcomes, such as family satisfaction, marital agreement and parent-child communication. Other studies suggest that family flexibility had strongest relationship to adolescent family life satisfaction and happiness (Henry & Lovelace, 1995; Keshavarz, Moulavi, & Yarmohammadian, 2008). Also, balanced cohesion and balanced flexibility are necessary for effective family structure (Dreman, 2003). In addition, this finding is in agreement with Thomas and Ozechowski (2007) which supported of the direct effect of cohesion on family functioning, and the direct effect of communication on both cohesion and adaptability, and the indirect effect of communication on family functioning through its facilitation of cohesion and adaptability.

Finally, the contribution of enmeshment (.24) in family cohesion was very low in this research. In other words, 24 percent of family cohesion variance is accounted for by enmeshment. However, the contribution of rigid (.16) on family flexibility was very low, which only 16 percent of family flexibility variance is

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accounted for by rigid. This study produced results which align with findings of previous work in this field.

Some studies showed the types of family and couple systems (enmeshed and rigid family) are not necessarily dysfunctional, particularly if a family belongs to an especial religious group or ethnic group (Manzi, Vignoles, Regalia, & Scabini, 2006; Michael-Tsabari & Lavee, 2012). However, in the collectivism culture, role rigidity or extreme togetherness is acceptable and even preferred by family members. For example Everri, Mancini, and Fruggeri (2015) advanced an explanation related to the socio-cultural background. Their study of Italian adolescents showed that they "might have interpreted rigidity as a protective emotional bond related to more general parental engagement, friends and interests. Based on these results if a family belongs to a culture in which normative expectations support extreme behaviors in the cohesion and flexibility dimensions in an unbalanced system, this type may be functional as long as the family members are satisfied with it. Normative expectations include a strong set family values that are passed from one generation to the next. Therefore, when the culture of the family supports enmeshed and role rigidity, the unbalanced type may function well as long as all family members are satisfied. It seems that collectivism culture and ethnic structure in Iran to support of extreme behaviors on cohesion and flexibility dimensions. Thus it does seem the behavior of an enmeshed or rigid family in Iranian is not a risk factor and, in fact, the behaviors can provide a protection function. This finding has important implications for developing the family dynamics model in collective cultures.

As mentioned by some studies (Baer, 2007; Manzi et al., 2006), attempts to change a rigid family to be more flexible, or moving an enmeshed family to become separated might be

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inappropriate to a family's values. This idea is in agreement with Loriedo, Santo, and Visani (2013) findings which showed enmeshed is located in an intermediate position in relation to the two dimensions, rather close to the cluster of positive adaptation. This can be explained as the positive value family cohesion, based on a strong mutual support, and enmeshment is very viable, especially in Italian culture. In sum, the results of this research support the idea that the family dynamics dimensions (cohesion and rigid) are connected to individuals' developmental life cycle and the dynamics affecting the cohesion of the family are culturally sensitive. This also is congruent with our earlier observations, which showed that satisfaction with the degree of cohesion and adaptability is more important for good family functioning than higher cohesion and adaptability when family members are dissatisfied (Greeff, 2000).

In addition, the current study found the parameter estimate for the direct effect of communication on family functioning was not significant but that family communication positively predicated family cohesion and family flexibility and have indirect effect on family functioning.

In other words, the much larger percentage of cohesion and flexibility variances is accounted by communication family such as expressiveness, communication clarity, and problem solving.

There are several possible explanations for this result. Regarding to Olson and Gorall (2003), a family that has positive family communication will be better able to alter their cohesion and flexibility to meet developmental and situational demands that arise, whereas family systems with poor communication tend to have lower functioning in regard to cohesion and flexibility. The studies of Berryhill, Harless, and Kean (2018) revealed that

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cohesive-flexible family functioning was related to higher levels of positive communication.

There are similarities between the finding of this study and those described by Thomas and Ozechowski (2000). They hypothesized that communication is related to family functioning indirectly through its facilitation by cohesion and adaptability.

The other findings of this research illustrated the relationship between family dynamics and family function had significant differences across the six stages of life cycle. This finding confirms the ideas of Franklin, Streeter, and Springer (2001) who suggested that a family must change its way of functioning frequently throughout the family life cycle. The family life cycle is made up of stages that family experiences. Throughout each stage, families adapt their functioning to meet the needs of all family members. Walsh (2004) In relation to family resilience theory, suggested that every family would be faced with challenges or adverse events to which they must adapt. These results are consistent with those of other studies and suggest that a couple's relationship will alter with baby arrival, that it's not appropriate to parent with teenaged children in the same way you parented a 6-year-old. When adult children leave home, the degree of closeness with parents will alter and adjust their interactions to meet the required levels of flexibility and cohesion.

There are similarities between the attitudes expressed in this study and this described by (Greeff, 2000). His findings showed there are significant differences in stages were found in married couples average scores for flexibility (stage 1 more than stage 2 and 3), communication in the marital relationship (stage 1 more than stage 2 and 4), satisfaction with the quality of time and financial circumstances (stage 4 more than stage 2).

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Limitations and Implications

The results provide a deeper understanding of Iranian family dynamics across the life cycle. The literature review for this research did not identify any systematic studies which be analyzed the structures of family dynamics based on Circumplex Model in each of the stages of family life cycle in Iranian couples. This research addressed this gap in the literature. However, this study has several limitations and requires further examination and additional research.

First this research considered only the three dimensions of family dynamics (family cohesion, family flexibility and communication) as the independent variables. The two dimensions of family functioning (family satisfaction and general family function) intended as the dependent variables. Due to the complexity of the family system, the results should be cautiously generalized to the whole family system. Since this study was cross-sectional rather than longitudinal, it was not possible to specify the interactions that occur between the various constructs over-time. According to Olson (2011) while the scales for balanced cohesion and balanced flexibility of FACES IV worked very well empirically, as did the unbalanced scales of disengaged and chaotic, the enmeshed and rigid scales still need more work to improve their reliability and the amount of variance they account for in research.

These results highlight specific points for both families and professionals who work with families. The findings showed family cohesion, flexibility and communication directly or indirectly are very important aspects of family functioning. Specifically, married couples with flexibility are more likely to report high functioning. This has been supported in the past (Dreman, 2003; Henry & Lovelace, 1995; Keshavarz et al., 2008;

Thomas & Ozechowski, 2007). Another finding is that family life cycle has an impact on relationship between family dynamics and family functioning. It is important for therapists to identify potential predictors of these variables. This study adds to the information known about family dynamic structures in Iranian population.

Since communication had a positive impact on cohesion and flexibility, counselors and therapists can focus on this dimension as the most important tool for achieving a change in the family's levels of cohesion and flexibility toward balanced types.

Though all hypotheses of this study were not confirmed, the findings offer further support that research in the area of family dynamics is needed. The development across the family life-cycle is a natural evolutionary process that initiates the family on the way of development, growth, maturation and change (Matejević & Jovanović, 2011). The family in every developmental stage identifies specific tasks and resolves them. This research suggests that counselors may also benefit from evaluating the impact of various moderating variables on family dynamics and functioning.

In addition, this study provides some potentially valuable clues regarding the validity problems associated with the Circumplex Model. This study provides an example of the use of structural equation modeling to test multivariate theory-based hypotheses about family functioning. SEM is well suited for model testing because the researcher can specify causal models that correspond to a theoretical perspective.

One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is the results of the full fledge SEM that supported the hypothesized relationships. Specifically, the maximum likelihood

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estimation of the model supported the adequacy of the model. In addition, the results produced statistically significant path coefficients, implying causal links.

Although family cohesion and family flexibility were positively related to family function, the contribution of family flexibility in family dynamics was more than family cohesion. The present study confirms previous findings and contributes additional evidence that suggested the flexibility is likely more important than cohesion in predicting marital stability and satisfaction (James & Hunsley, 1995; Mathis & Tanner, 1991; McFarlane et al., 1995).

The current findings add to a growing body of literature on the effect of family communication on family cohesion and family flexibility. The results confirmed the significant effect of family communication on family cohesion and family flexibility, while this study did not confirm the direct effect of family communication on family functioning. The present study showed the relationship between family dynamic dimensions and family function had significant differences across six stages of life cycle. The structural model fit demonstrated some changes across six stage of family life cycle. The present findings seem to be consistent with other research which found that a family must change its way of functioning frequently throughout the family life cycle. The ability to understand and respond to the needs of different stages of family life cycle for increased or decreased closeness or flexibility in a relationship is a protective mechanism (Franklin et al., 2001; Greeff, 2000; Sanders, Bell, Place, & Adelaide, 2011; Winek, 2009).

Healthy family functioning is a important area of interest for Iranian mental health professionals who provide family interventions. The current findings add substantially to family

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professionals' knowledge of family structure patterns of Iranian families.

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