A Survey of the Relationship Between Differentiation and Coping Strategies in Mothers of Children with Autism

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Abstract

Aim: Regarding the existence of more coping problems in mothers of children with autism and the effect of differentiation on coping strategies, this study aimed to investigate the relationship between coping strategies and differentiation in mothers of children with autism.

Methodology: Research was done by correlation coefficient. Research society includes all mothers with autism children in Qom. Participants of the study consist of 40 mothers with autism children selected by means of non-convenience sampling. Measuring instruments include checklist of coping skills and questionnaire of differentiation.

Findings: Research findings show that differentiation has a positive relation with problem-based coping strategies and a significant negative relation with and non-effective coping. However, there was not a relation shown between less effective and emotional-based strategies with differentiation (P<0.01).

Conclusion: Increasing differentiation leads to the use of effective strategies and the reduction of the use of ineffective coping strategies that are essential to cope with stress and anxiety resulting from parenting children with autism.

Keywords: Differentiation, Coping Strategies, Mothers of Children with Autism

Introduction

Existence of disorder in family members puts lots of pressure on family in various fields including mental field and causes turmoil and insecurity in families. To stand this dissolution person should have high separation and distinction power Differentiation is as a psychological construct is one of Bowens hypothesis basic concepts which has been translated to self-differentiation and also separating me.

Family as the first formation of personality's base is the most fundamental creator factor people's differentiation and emotional independence (soleimani nejad, 2010). In Bowen opinion kind of an emotional system ruling the family structure which has the ability to transfer between generations and people’s mental health is up to the level of their differentiation and separation from the system (Roytburd, Myrna, 2008, quoted from josephy, 2011). According to this theory at least 4 factors, emotional reactivity, emotional detachment, mixing with others and ability to earn my place from differentiations level predicts or separating myself which is the most important concept of Bowens systemic theory and describes as the ability of interacting between emotional and intellectual autonomy, intimacy and continuity in relations (Meteyard, Andersen, Marx, 2011).

This concept suggests that how much people are able to distinguish between their intellectual and emotional processes. In other words peoples level of the ability to avoid the automatic subordination of emotion, describes self-differentiation. Bowen states that the ideal perfection is not being a cold and lifeless, heavily objective and impercipient person, but we going to be after checks and balances, define, and achieve a personal identify. However, it is not in the cost of losing our ability of traumatic and spontaneous emotions. The main aim of self-differentiation is balance between emotions and cognition (barvaty, naghshbandi arjmand, 2003).

The main core of Bowen's theory is, the concept of self-differentiation, which is a bridge to understanding the interdependence situation. Bowen believed that we could determine people based on the range of fusion or undifferentiating between their emotional and intellectual performance. At the end of this domain, there are people who their emotions and minds mix and their life is under the control of emotional system. As a result, these people have less flexibility and more
emotional dependency to others. At the other end, there are people who have the most self-differentiation. In these people their intellectual performance can save their autonomy and in the time of stress, they are flexible, adaptive and independent from others emotional reactions (Gibson, Donigian, 2006, Popko, 2002).

People with high differentiation, have more clear family borders and the ability of autonomous performance and personal fitness, they experience the low level of anxiety have powerful emotions. However, they are not control by them (Whaby, Pely-Poka, Halaby, Elnaya, 2006).

Differentiation also reflects in the ability of using personal positions, which is a defined and obvious emotion from our self in the time, that person is under pressure by others to act otherwise.

Less differentiated people emotionally are dependent to others. They think less about themselves, act and feel. While differentiated people have the ability to operate their personal positions in relations, and they are able to pay attention to their thoughts and emotions out of their need of obeying others (popko, 2004).

If peoples Differentiation consider as a spectrum, there are differentiated people at the end of this spectrum, and undifferentiated people (tightly intertwined) on the other end of the spectrum and other people in different part of the spectrum. The undifferentiated people who are at the low end of the spectrum, experience a high level of chronic anxiety and the most vulnerable people for acute mental problems such as schizophrenia (barvaty et al, 2003).

In the theory of family systems, the family health key and specially person is in their benefiting of both feeling of belonging to the family and Differentiation that causes the recovery and increase the persons and families psychological and social functions (Corey, 1996).

The existence of a kid with disabilities affects the psychological and social functions of all the family members. Meanwhile, the mother-as a member who has the most interaction and proximity with the child – can be endangered of these kinds of problems (Duarte, Bordin, Yazigi, and Mooney, Totsika et al, 2011).

Recent studies shows that having a child with disabilities effects on parents psychological states and causes stress in the family (Dale, Jahoda, Totsika and et al, 2011). In this case, mother suffers more stress (Hastings, 2013).

Mothers according to their personality structure feel more responsible and sometimes feel guilty, in compare with mothers of normal Childs, have more care duties and experience more stress in the life (Weiss, 2002, Baker- Ericzen, Brookman- Frazee, Stahmer, 2005, htsyngr et al, 2005).

As parents, affect the child growth, the child growth and its properties effects on family function (Altiere and Kluge, 2009).


Higgins et al reviewed the family’s function and coping strategies in families which have children with autism spectrum disorder, the results showed that having such a child imports a considerable stress on family and parents of these Childs have less marital satisfaction, solidarity and family adaptation in compare to controlled group.

Afshari(2004) showed that coping strategies in mothers who have autistic children is less effective or ineffective or emotion-focused and also has effect on these mothers mental health, because of these many problems of these children, families and specially mothers of these children suffer from a lots of tension and mental pressure (yektakhah, allameh and gorgy, 2014).

in other side there is a meaningful relationship between personality traits, emotional stability, responsibility and tireless with problem-focused strategies and also between socialization personality traits with emotion-focused strategies in mothers who have autism children (rajab, pooshne, ghobari bonab, 2009).

Jalali moghadam, poor etemad, sadogh pour, khoshabi and chime (2007), during their research found that mothers of children with evolutionary pervasive disorder use coping strategies based on physical containment in compare to mothers of normal children. However, in other coping strategies there was significant different between them.

The research of oshabie, farzadfar, kaksolitani,pour etemad and nik khah ( 2010), result shown that there is a meaningful different between the mothers of normal children and autism children in terms of stress variables, problem-focused and emotion-focused coping.
strategies, but there was no significant different in terms of unhelpful and non-effective coping strategies. Since the differentiation plays an important and basic role in having a healthy life and reducing chronic anxiety, and in other hand according to that person's opposition the crisis plays an important role in the way that cope and the amount of experienced anxiety, which affects persons, distinguish way.

This research reviews the relation between differentiation and coping strategies in mothers of the autistic children. The results of this research can leads the attention of mental health experts to supporting and creating programs to identify, study and supporting such a parents. In other words with identifying and also determining the possible causes leads to more use of less effective coping strategies on mothers, can reduce from intensity of increasing factors and add to the intensity of prevention factors.

Methodology
Participants in this research include all the mothers of the children with autism studying in autism school in Qom that the range of their age was between 22-38 years old. Sample group includes 40 mothers with the children with autism that are choose with the available sampling method for avoiding cultural and economic effects, choosing mothers was based on existence demographic forms in the case of student. After choosing mothers with coordination with the states exceptional office, the permission was returned for the meeting with the mothers and implementation the questionnaires. Then about the aim of the research and the way of answering to the questionnaire was explained for mothers, and it was

Research Tools
Check List for coping skills: This questionnaire is a multidimensional tool that examines the ways in responding individuals to stress. This Check list has 72 articles and 18 classes that each class has been composed of 4 options and has been set on the basis of Lazarus model from stress and behavioral self-regulation model has been presented by Carve, Scuirr and Windtrap (1989). This questionnaire was translated by Mohammad Khani (1992), and according to Iranian culture and has been revised using other existing coping measures.

Since the list does not contain all coping behaviors, the scales that had been evaluated in study of Epstein et al (1989) has also been added to them (Mohammad Khani, 1992). Grading this scale is done in two ways. In the first method each class can be individually scored. In the second method, scoring is calculated is basis on test infrastructure that 3 independent scores about problem-focused categories, emotion-focused and less effective and ineffective coping will be calculated. Scores range on a scale of focused on problem-solving and excitement from 0 to 80 and on scale of less effective and ineffective are from 0 to 128. Carve et al (1989) examined the reliability and validity of this tool in three separate studies on a group of students. Results of evaluating reliability showed reliability coefficient for for the different subscales was from 0.42 to 0.76. In Iran, Mohammad Khani (1992) also made questionnaire available for several psychology professors to calculate the validity and tools validity were approved in terms of them. In calculating the reliability also the average of reliability coefficient of total scale was obtained as 0.93, and it was found that the scale is valid tool for assessing the coping strategies.

The differentiation questionnaire is a questionnaire with 46 questions that it is used to assess the differentiation of people and it has been composed of four subscales: emotional reactivity, my position, emotional attraction and commingling with others. This questionnaire was made in 1998 by Ask vrvn and Friedlander in 2003 by Skowron and Smith was revised and the final questionnaire was made by Jackson based on Bowen theory. This questionnaire has been graded with the Likert scale in a 6 options whole. Cronbach's alpha has been calculated for the total scale of differentiation equal to 0.88 and for subscales 0.08, 0.08, 0.08 and 0.74. Yunesi (2006) the reliability coefficient of this questionnaire was calculated equal to 0.85 using Cronbach's alpha.

Findings
As it is seen in table below, between differentiation and problem-oriented of beta coefficient equal to 0.266 and given the significant level of 0.00 indicates that there is a relationship between differentiation and problem-oriented, and according to the coefficient of determination adjusted, differentiation predicts 7.6 percent of strategies changes of problem-oriented. Beta coefficient between differentiation and emotion oriented strategies is equal to 0.064 that there is no significant relationship between differentiation and emotion oriented strategies due to the significant level of 0.29. Also according to beta coefficient between differentiation and less effective strategies there is no significant relationship between differentiation and less effective strategies -0.107 and significant level of 0.082 the beta coefficient is equal to - 0.21 between differentiation and ineffective strategies that due to the significant level of 0.001 indicates that there is inverse and significant relationship between differentiation of ineffective strategies and according to the coefficient of determination adjusted,

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differentiation predicts the 4% of ineffective strategies changes.

Table 1: mean, standard deviation and correlation coefficient of variables with differentiation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Sd</th>
<th>Correlation coefficient</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem oriented</td>
<td>12/17</td>
<td>70/3</td>
<td>26/0</td>
<td>00/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emotion oriented</td>
<td>89/10</td>
<td>74/2</td>
<td>06/0</td>
<td>29/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less effective</td>
<td>52/5</td>
<td>85/1</td>
<td>10/0-</td>
<td>08/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ineffective</td>
<td>07/5</td>
<td>52/3</td>
<td>21/0-</td>
<td>00/0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion and conclusion
The findings of this research showed that there is a significant correlation between problems oriented coping and differentiation. Due to the fact that, according to Bowen the differentiation is described order to ability to restoring the balance between emotional and intellectual autonomy, intimacy and continuity in the relationship (Meteyard et al., 2011) and differentiated individuals are able to restoring the balance between their cognition and emotion (Barvati et al., 2006; Papco, 2004) and in time of stress act in flexible, adaptive and independent of the emotional response of others (Gibson and Donigian, 2006; Papco, 2002) have experienced low levels of anxiety and are not controlled by their emotions (Whaby et al., 2006). So instead of focusing on emotions are concentrated on problem and finding solutions to it, so the relationship between differentiation and problem-focused coping is explained. On the other hand, in theory of family, family health key, especially, individual is hidden in his enjoyment of both the sense of belonging to family and differentiation that leads to increase in psychological and social functions of person and family (Corey, 1996). So allocating value for emotions and feelings and somewhat emotional acting is a part of a healthy personality because in terms of Bowen the ideal perfection is not to being a cold and soulless and extremely objective and feeless person, according to this description can be found why there was no significant relationship between differentiation and emotion-focused coping. There was no significant relationship between differentiation and less effective strategies because each person with a high level of differentiation and with a low level of differentiation may be used the less effective strategies the persons with high levels of differentiation as a temporary coping method until they able to achieve a correct solution and people with low differentiation to deal with it as a permanent coping method. The results showed a inverse and significant relationship between differentiation and ineffective strategies, because people less differentiated in anxiety positions such as a child with a disability that leads to creation of stress in the family (Dale et al., 2007; Osborne et al., 2007; Zembat and Yıldız, 2010; Tuska et al., 2011) and has an effect on the functioning of family members, especially mother that due to more interaction has with the child is at risk of problems and a greater risk (Duarte, et al., 2005; Tuska et al., 2011 and Brobst et al., 2004; Hastings et al., 2005; Estes et al., 2009; Altiere Kluge, 2009; Dabrowska and Pisula, 2010; Weiss, 2002; Baker-ERICZEN et al., 2005; Hastings et al., 2005; Hastings, 2003; Osborne and Reid, 2010; Brobst et al., 2009; Davis & Carter, 2008; Khoramabadi et al., 2009). This stress has negative effect on theier self-efficacy (hassal et al., 2005; quoted by Hill and Rose, 2009; Hastings and Brown, 2002; McConachie & Diggle, 2007; Burnham, 2011), and leads to turning them to ineffective coping strategies. So mothers with autistic children experience high stress due to the presence of these children that is reduced their self-efficacy and differentiation of reduced and is increased the use of ineffective coping strategies in them that are in line with researches of (Hastings et al., 2005; Afshari, 2004; Rajabi et al., 2009; Jalali Moghaddam et al., 2007; Khoushabi et al., 2010) showed that parents of children with autism use the ineffective strategies, less effective and relies on the physical containment.

References
stressed in mothers of children with autism mothers