



Examining the components of power dynamics in the family: a sample of qualitative study

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Abstract

Aim: The aim of the present study is to examine the components of power in the family. **Method:** This study was conducted with a qualitative method and a theme analysis method (Clark & Brauan, 2006). The purposeful sampling method was homogeneous in this way that 12 married people, both men and women, were satisfied and dissatisfied with married life, who were selected based on the entry and exit criteria and were interviewed. The research tool was semi-structured interview. The collected data were analyzed with the help of thematic analysis. **Results:** The results showed six main categories, which were 1) sources of power (legal, individual, couple, family) 2) distribution of power (based on individual capabilities, external power sources, gender and age) 3) strategies for achieving power (compatible and incompatible strategies) 4) pathology of power (lack of power hierarchy, regulation of power based on external sources and inability of one or both couples to regulate power) 5) goal of gaining power (individualism, matrimonialism and family idealism) 6) Effects of power in the family (negative effects and positive effects). **Conclusion:** According to these results, it can be said that power in the family is a multi-dimensional and dynamic structure whose damages can lead the family to chaos and vice versa.

Keywords: power, family, theme analysis.

Introduction

The family has always had a special place due to its importance in meeting physical, psychological, emotional, social, and even spiritual needs. This important position is multiplied when the production and upbringing of new humans are added to it. On the other hand, the family has a role in transferring and preserving the culture of a society. Therefore, human-friendly thinkers have always been concerned with preserving it (Ferguson & Evans, 2019). In this regard, one of the issues that family therapists pay attention to is power. The hierarchy of power in the strategic theory in the field of family therapy is one of the structures that has been clearly mentioned (Fiese, Salerno, Deater-Deckard, Jouriles, and Whisman, 2019). According to this theory, the absence of a hierarchy of power in the family causes damage; every system has a hierarchy, and the rules regarding who should be in the primary position and who should be in the secondary position of power must be clear (Jackson & Lenders, 2020).

The power structure of the family is hidden in the network of relationships that family members have with each other, such as personal and emotional links that are formed as a result of the roles of marriage, fatherhood and motherhood, sisterhood and brotherhood, and are not replaced by the entry of a new person. This is one of the factors that can determine the position of individuals in making family decisions. In the field of family therapy, the strategic theory of Jay Haley is the most important theory, one of the concepts of which is power distribution, and the absence of a hierarchy of power is a significant damage to the functioning of the family. Other theories have less directly referred to it, but in the field of family sociology, two important theories of Parsons, which consider gender and age as important factors in power distribution, and Peter Blau's theory, which considers the power to produce financial resources as important in shaping power resources in the family, have been raised (Hosseini & Kavyani, 2019).

Clinical experiences show that many marital conflicts are related to power struggles, and many questions in this regard are still unanswered. For example, it is not clear what causes greater power in decision-making in some subsystems? Or why in some families, couples never agree on power and these power struggles are passed down from generation to generation? The results of such research that can identify the apparent and hidden dimensions of power in the family and also determine how to apply compatible methods of exercising power and determining power distribution areas can be a path for family counselors to provide corrective solutions and pathology of power. These results also help enrich family therapy texts and pave the way for further research. Therefore, this study aimed to answer this question through qualitative research tradition: What are the components of power in the family?

Method

This study was conducted with a qualitative method and a theme analysis method (Clark & Brauan, 2006). The purposeful sampling method was homogeneous in this way that 12 married people, both men and women, were satisfied and dissatisfied with married life, who were selected based on the entry and exit criteria and were interviewed. The research tool was semi-structured interview. The collected data were analyzed with the help of thematic analysis.

Results

The results showed six main categories, which were 1) sources of power (legal, individual, couple, family) 2) distribution of power (based on individual capabilities, external power sources, gender and age) 3) strategies for achieving power (compatible and incompatible strategies) 4) pathology of power (lack of power hierarchy, regulation of power based on external sources and inability of one or both couples to regulate power) 5) goal of gaining power (individualism, matrimonialism and family idealism) 6) Effects of power in the family (negative effects and positive effects).

Conclusion

According to these results, it can be said that power in the family is a multi-dimensional and dynamic structure whose damages can lead the family to chaos and vice versa. Any communication system that functions for individuals, couples, and society has power, whether intentionally or unintentionally. The family is also a natural system that is not exempt from this characteristic. Power in the family is characterized by dynamics that manifest in power resources, power distribution, strategies for obtaining power, power pathology, the goal of power acquisition, and the effects of power in the family. In any case, these results can have clear implications, and that is that for a successful family, power and its distribution must be formulated in a way that satisfies the couple. However, some individuals, due to personal problems, individualistic goals, and incorrect ways of obtaining power, cause the effects of power to result in family harm.

This study, like other studies, had limitations, including the fact that the evolutionary trend of power during the family cycle was not considered in this study. It is suggested that the evolutionary trend of power during the life cycle be examined in another study. It is recommended that appropriate packages for modifying the power structure in the family be designed based on these findings.

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