



Family Stability Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Introduction: Family is the most appropriate place to meet human needs and the best place to support human security and psychological well-being. Accordingly, young people should be encouraged to get married as soon as they meet the requirements for marriage. They also should be trained on how to strengthen their family life. For this reason, the present qualitative study aimed to develop a family model based on the theory of planned behavior to explain family stability.

Methods: The data analysis method was a rule-guided qualitative content analysis. The data were collected by conducting interviews with 19 family therapists and experts in Yazd Province in 2018. The participants were selected through purposive sampling. The questions asked in the semi-structured interviews were developed based on the theory of planned behavior dealing with issues including behavioral intention, attitudes, subjective norms, and behavioral control. The interviews continued to the data saturation point when no new information or themes were observed in the data. Then the transcripts of the interviews were typed and the related themes were extracted and coded. After coding the data, qualitative research experts were asked to determine the content validity of the codes and their related categories. Then, based on the extracted categories, a local model was developed.

Results: Based on the data analysis, 4 main themes (behavioral intention, attitudes, subjective norms, and behavioral control) and 8 sub-themes (self-control, patience, luxury-seeking, self-esteem, parenting, need satisfaction, positive attitudes toward marriage, and attainment of peace) were extracted.

Conclusion: Since the family is the best emotional, social, and psychological shelter for its members, this study developed a model that can be valuable for educating families who have different problems. The developed model can also be used by family therapists and professionals dealing with family issues.

Keywords: Theory of planned behavior, Family stability, Qualitative study

Introduction

Today, family experts and practitioners believe that the emergence and consolidation of the family as a social institution precedes the formation of all other social institutions and that the survival of social life and generations is not impossible but

through the formation of the family and the performance of its various functions. Family is a social system, officially adopted and developed in all societies (1). The concept of social construction is often associated with the concept of family and kinship. The role of family as the smallest social

unit with its various functions can be important from both a positive (the center for peace) and a negative (social harm) perspective. The mental health of generations of the community depends on the family as a focal point for the growth and development of talents any harm to which can adversely affect future generations and involve many social organizations. Pourmovahed et al. believe that family is an open system whose members are emotionally interconnected but also encouraged to develop their identity. The atmosphere of such a family is full of unconditional love and acceptance by every member of the family. Thus, family can resolve probable conflicts and willingly respond to the requests of its members for help (1). Family is the smallest and, at the same time, the most basic social institution and a place for the psychosocial and spiritual development of individuals (2). Family is the most important social institution underlying individual life and a place for the formation of human personality (3). Of all the institutions, organizations, and social foundations, family plays the most important, most valuable, and most effective role (4). Couples may engage in different types of disputes. Some want to avoid such disputes at all costs, while others want to fight to a great extent. Some also talk about their conflicts and reach conciliation without even raising their voices (5).

Therapists have always sought to solve family problems. They have used various ways to do so. In this study, it was attempted to use the theory of behavioral planning to develop a family therapy model. The theory of rational action and the theory of planned behavior both focus on theoretical constructs related to individual motivational factors as potential determinants of behavior. Research shows that the most effective training programs are based on theoretical approaches that are rooted in behavior change models of the theory of planned behavior (6). According to the theory of rational action, the intention leads to a particular action in the correct way only when behavior is under the control of the individual. If behaviors are not completely under control, i.e. the performance of an action depends on other people or the person doesn't have the required skills to perform the behavior, then the relationship between intention and behavior is assumed to be weakened (6). First, Ashoogh et al. argued that people make their behavioral decisions based on a rational review of the information available. Second, people take into account the outcomes of their actions before making a decision. Accordingly, they developed the

theory of rational action in 1975 to predict and explain individual behavior. Then, given the constraints, especially on behaviors that are not voluntary, they expanded the mentioned model into the recent theory of planned behavior in 1985 by adding a perceived behavioral control factor (7). There are many qualitative studies conducted in Iran using the theory of planned behavior on family behavior models (6,7,8).

However, this study was a qualitative research that employed a rule-guided qualitative content analysis to develop a local family model. Moreover, Pourmovahed proposed a family consolidation model based on McMaster's model and evaluated its effectiveness on couples in Yazd (9) using a qualitative research method and the concepts extracted based on the theory of planned behavior. Ardian conducted a mixed-method study on 27 individuals in five groups of couples applying for divorce, parents, social workers, family counselors, and judges. Using the qualitative results, a questionnaire was developed and validated based on the constructs of the theory of planned behavior. In the quantitative part, a quasi-experimental study was performed using a pretest and posttest design with the control group (10). The study was conducted using a qualitative research method and data analysis was performed based on the concepts derived from the theory of planned behavior and Pourmovahed's Family Consolidation Scale (9). Counseling centers are increasingly welcomed, and counseling becomes more meaningful in people's lives, but the point is the extent to which family therapists use scientific principles to treat couples and the extent to which families can trust therapists to solve their problems. Families spend budget and time to get their problems solved, but the outcome may not be as expected. It appears that therapists' use of imperative and unscientific methods that do not fit the local culture has created public dissatisfaction and distrust. Accordingly, this study attempted to evaluate the therapeutic approach of the theory of planned behavior and develop a local model that fits the needs of the community, bridge the existing scientific gap, and assess its effectiveness on family consolidation.

Methods

The data in this study were analyzed using a rule-guided qualitative content analysis method. The participants were selected through purposive sampling. The data were collected by conducting interviews with 19 family therapists and experts in Yazd Province in 2018. The questions asked in the

semi-structured interviews were developed based on the theory of planned behavior dealing with issues such as behavioral intention, attitudes, subjective norms, and behavioral control. Each interview lasted 20-30 minutes. After asking personal information questions, general questions were asked. For instance, “How do families in Yazd view marriage? And why?” or “How do families in Yazd control their behavior? Based on the responses provided by the interview, exploratory questions were asked, and the interviews continued following the theory of planned behavior. The response rate was very satisfactory. The interviews continued to the data saturation point when no new codes and categories were observed in the data. Therefore, it is not possible to determine the number of participants before reaching data saturation, but this does not mean that the sample size does not matter in qualitative research. Nevertheless, the adequacy of the sample size in qualitative research is a relative issue and a matter of judgment and the researcher should note that the sample should not be too large or too small. Therefore, the adequacy of the sample size was taken into account in this study. In total, 19 family therapists and counselors who have worked with families for many years in Yazd were interviewed.

Data collection procedure

This study addressed family stability based on the theory of planned behavior. The purpose of this qualitative design was to develop a local model of family stability. In the first step, qualitative questions were developed based on the theory of planned behavior. This theory deals with issues such as behavioral intention, attitudes, subjective norms, and behavioral control. The research population consisted of family therapists and counselors who were working for at least 10 years in the field of family counseling and therapy in Yazd province in 2018. They were married and had at least one child. They were also residents of Yazd Province. Using purposive sampling, 19 therapists and experts were selected as the participants in the research sample.

Data analysis procedure

First, each interview was recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were reviewed several times to come up with a general understanding of the participants' views. Besides, any ambiguity and inconsistency were resolved by referring regularly to the participants. The related concepts and themes were recognized by a detailed analysis of the transcripts. To validate the data, the four criteria of credibility, transferability,

conformability, and dependability were used. The qualitative section of this research was conducted in several steps: Inviting family therapists and counselors, conducting in-depth interviews, coding, categorizing, extracting relevant categories from the interview transcripts, extensive study of extracted concepts and themes, and developing the research model based on the theory of planned behavior. To this end, the interviews were conducted in training centers, universities, and associations. Upon the participants' consent, the interviews were recorded and transcribed accurately. The transcripts were then analyzed and summarized to extract and codify keywords and concepts. The coding procedure was checked to ensure the accuracy of the coding concepts. The data collection procedure began the early January to late March. The data collection and codification procedures were supervised by several professors in the related field.

Results

After conducting the interviews, the collected data were analyzed. Accordingly, 4 main themes and 8 subthemes were extracted as shown in the Table 1.

As can be seen, one of the main themes observed in this study is the behavioral intention, which is subcategorized into two sub-themes (need satisfaction and parenting).

Need satisfaction: The results of the study showed that need satisfaction, as one of the components of behavioral intention, is one of the reasons for marriage as stated by the public. The concept of needs refers to basic needs including physiological needs. To guarantee a healthy marital life, spouses need to value each other's qualities, interests, and needs. People in noble families pay special attention to their spouse's behavior and needs in their verbal and non-verbal relationships, affections, and decisions. Accordingly, Participant 12 stated, “*The first impetus for marriage is to meet needs*”. Besides, spouses need to try to meet each other's sexual needs. They must legitimize their sexual desires. Reproduction is one of the main functions of the family. The regulation of sexual relations was shown to be only a part of an essential area of shared life. According to Participant 15, “*The main reason for marriage is to seek happiness and sexual pleasure*”. Another need that was emphasized was the need for affection and emotional attachment between the couples. Participant 9 stated, “*Marriage helps a person find a companion and partner in his or her life*”.

Table 1. The main and secondary concepts extracted based on the theory of planned behavior

Main themes	Subthemes
Behavioral intention	Need satisfaction Parenting
Attitudes	Positive attitudes toward marriage Attainment of peace
Subjective norms	Luxury-seeking Self-esteem
Behavioral control	Self-control Patience

Parenting

The participants believed that one of the functions of family is parenting and child-rearing. Families living in Yazd try to train their children to live in the community. Understanding the laws, norms, religious teachings, and rules governing the community among family members is the first step in parenting. Families also spend the highest cost for their children's education, even willing to cut back on the costs spent to meet their needs so that their children can attend good schools and the best universities in the country. According to Participant 15, "*People of Yazd care about their own and their children's education*". Participants believed that a balanced parenting style is followed by families. Parents tend to adopt a balanced approach to their children's education. They make laws to be followed by their children, and simultaneously support them and meet their needs. They are also serious about enforcing the laws and are strict on education as one of the main principles for the family. One of the participants stated, "The families are trying to raise their children so that they serve as good members of the community" (Participant 3).

The second main theme that emerged in the present study is the attitudes, which is subdivided into positive attitudes toward marriage and attainment of peace.

Positive attitudes toward marriage

According to the participants' views, positive attitudes to marriage were divided into sub-themes, the first of which was families giving weight to marriage. They encourage their children to marry. Their mission is to teach their children the basics of marital life. Marriage is one of the most important stages of human life, and there are many findings on positive aspects of marriage that point to its importance in the physical and psychological health of people. In recent years, many social, psychological, and family professionals have focused on the quality of marital relationships and their impact on the mental and physical health of the family. Participant 1 stated, "Religious teachings

have a positive effect on the marriage process". Marriage is one of the most important events in human life. Human is a very complex subject. One of the things that distinguish humans from other beings is that humans are the only creatures whose personality is formed in the context of the family. Furthermore, human cannot be defined as an entity that is independent of the family. The first years of human life are spent in the family environment, and thus one's personality is formed within the family. Therefore, family plays a fundamental role in shaping one's psychological characteristics. Accordingly, Participant 19 believed, "*The people of Yazd consider marriage a very blessed and sacred event*".

Attainment of peace

The second theme emerged from the participants' statements was the attainment of peace through rational marriage. In most societies today, marriage without love, interest, and affection is doomed to failure. In other words, at best, such a marriage is nothing but a deal. In a similar vein, Participant 11 stated, "*Parents dedicate themselves to their children so that they may live in peace and comfort*". Undoubtedly, this requires couples' dedication and commitment to raising their children and maintaining relationships among the family members. In many marital lives characterized by intimacy and commitment, family members love each other, are intimate with each other, and resolve their disputes and conflict with optimism. As was stated by Participant 5, "Parents try to provide a safe and quiet environment for their children". Expressing love and affection helps the family to develop its ability to face difficulties. Besides, the changes we make in ourselves are effective in keeping the vitality of this life. According to Participant 17, "*People show positive attitudes to marriage and they get married to attain peace*".

Luxury-seeking

One of the aspects of subjective norms pointed by the participants was luxury-seeking which is a challenge that many families face today. Although

luxury-seeking was one of the characteristics of advanced and industrialized countries in the past, this phenomenon is also affecting underdeveloped countries, including Iran. The problem is one of the major obstacles to marital life in Yazd province like other provinces. In view of that, Participant 2 stated, *"The media promotes emulation and luxury-seeking"*. Luxury-seeking as a way of life cannot be socially condemned but must be regarded as a domain in which social life is constructed. Currently, the majority of people are confronted with this social phenomenon. According to Participant 12, *"The negative effects of the media are manifested as wrong practices, consumerism, and emulation in Yazd community"*.

Self-esteem

The second aspect of subjective norms extracted from the interviews with the participants was self-esteem, which refers to an individual's subjective evaluation of their own worth. A person's assessment of and satisfaction with their own abilities, characteristics, and values is called self-esteem and self-belief. Accordingly, Participant 19 stated, *"In a successful family, the husband and the wife respect and admire each other in the presence of others"*. Self-esteem is one of the golden keys to success in life, and a person who loses self-esteem will become miserable and helpless, will not be able to exploit his/her potentials, and will not attain self-fulfillment. People with low self-esteem will face dozens of individual and social problems. According to Participant 4, *"A characteristic of efficient families is that they do not allow others to interfere with their common life affairs"*.

The fourth main theme that emerged in the present study is behavioral control, which is subdivided into the two secondary themes of self-control and patience.

Self-control

The first theme that was extracted from the participants' interviews concerning behavioral control was self-control as a self-management strategy. The concept of self-control was categorized into self-reward, self-contract, and stimulus control. The basic idea behind self-management assessments and interventions is that teaching managing problematic situations and problem-solving skills can train families on effective behavioral control and management. In this regard, Participant 17 stated, *"Families do not know how to manage their emotions and thoughts"*.

By rewarding self-control and acceptance of responsibility and practicing self-management

strategies and problem-solving skills in daily life, clients can enhance and generalize treatment outcomes. In self-management programs aimed to change or control specific behaviors, people understand that the main reason hindering the attainment of their goals is the absence of necessary skills or unrealistic expectations of change. According to Participant 10, *"people in Yazd are either afraid of expressing their emotions or fail to express them appropriately. Both of these have serious consequences for life"*.

Patience

The second subtheme that was pointed out by the participants as component of self-control was patience and resilience in the marital life. Human beings are living in a world that suffers from various social, environmental, occupational, and family problems and challenges, while the welfare from technological advances has increased their tendency to seek luxury and comfort and has reduced their capacity for resilience. In such circumstances, practicing patience promotes the inner power of humans and enhances their efficiency in various domains of life. In this vein, Participant 3 stated, *"Women in Yazd have a lot of patience and resilience"*. Resilience is a phenomenon that results from a person's natural adaptive responses that, despite facing serious threats, enables them to achieve success and overcome problems. According to Participant 8, *"The efficient and successful families in Yazd have a high level of patience and resilience"*.

Discussion

The present study employed a qualitative approach and used semi-structured interviews to develop a local model for family stability and consolidation based on the principles of the theory of planned behavior. This theory assumes that if a behavior is beyond the control of the individual, that behavior needs to be controlled voluntarily to yield positive outcomes. Controlling perceived behavior is regarded as the ease of putting into practice a person's intention. If people do not expect to be able to perform some behaviors successfully, they probably will not be motivated to do that. For example, if a person has little ability to resolve conflicts of life, he or she may not be able to resolve problems with his or her spouse. However, he/she may have a strong intention to do so (10). The constructs of the theory of planned behavior include behavioral intention, attitudes, subjective norms, and behavioral control that were used in this study to develop the interview questions. The concept of behavioral control was divided

into need satisfaction and parenting. According to the Ericsson's psychological steps, it can be suggested that if people solve the crisis at each stage successfully, a compatible schema is formed; otherwise, an incompatible schema develops (11). Similarly, the present study showed that, concerning behavioral intention, family needs must be satisfied. Families living in Yazd strive to satisfy their own needs and their children's desires in the best way possible.

Diana Baumrind, a pioneer in the study of parenting styles, believed that there is an authoritative parenting style. She argued that parents should be neither too strict nor careless about raising their children and that they should make laws to support their children and provide for their needs (12). Some of research studies, including her own research, confirmed this view. Authoritative parents have a lot of verbal exchange with their children and support them. An authoritative parent throws his hands around his or her child and says, *"Do you know that you shouldn't do that? Let's talk about how it can be done in the right way"* (13). The present study found that noble families living in Yazd try to employ effective parenting styles and a balanced approach to control and manage their children.

Concerning the concepts of positive attitudes toward marriage and attainment of peace, many researchers and clinical professionals and families in recent years have focused on the quality of marital relationships and marital satisfaction and their impact on family health (14). Marriage as one of the major events of an adult's life is a very complex issue. According to Minuchin, one of the things that distinguish humans from other beings is that humans are the only creatures whose personality is formed in the context of the family. Moreover, human cannot be defined as an entity that is independent of the family. The first years of human life are spent in the family environment, and thus one's personality is formed within the family. Therefore, family plays a fundamental role in shaping one's psychological characteristics (15). The attainment of peace is possible through the expression of love and affection. The changes we make in ourselves are like pruning dried or weak branches to keep the tree of life fresh. Most women, after the first two years of marriage, and almost every woman who has a baby, occasionally have this question in their minds: Does her husband still love her? This is not only a question, but it will become the most important concern in many women's

minds. It adversely affects many aspects of their lives and if they do not get the right answer, it at least leads to emotional divorce over time (16). The present study also showed that people who live in Yazd attach importance to the formation of a successful family. These findings were in line with the theory of structural family therapy (SFT).

In this study, subjective norms were categorized into luxury-seeking and self-esteem. Luxury-seeking as a way of life cannot be morally condemned, but it must be seen as a domain in which social life is constructed. Consumerism can be a territory for the choice and freedom of human attachment and values and can also lead to passiveness, self-alienation, constraint, and control. This dual nature of the limiting use of consumerism, which restricts its effectiveness on social life and culture, has made it a serious issue in research on the contemporary society. In addition to sociology, it has drawn the attention of a range of disciplines such as cultural, anthropological, economical, and psychological studies (17). The present study showed that noble families also paid special attention to luxury-seeking. This is also evident in other studies. Although the noble families in the region under study paid special attention to material things, this expansion of materialism and luxury-seeking has not impeded their attempts for proper development and growth of their children. The media also seems to have a great mission to do in this regard.

The possible reasons for low self-esteem are continuous criticism, lack of attention to individual differences, inappropriate environmental conditions, etc. (18). Rajabi regards self-esteem as a human attribute and a person's self-assessment of his or her worth and capabilities. Self-esteem is one of the psychological conditions in which a person has confidence in his or her ability to successfully do things because of previous experiences and believes that having confidence plays a vital role in a person's development and success (19). The benefits of self-esteem, in addition to being a part of mental health, are essential to a person's adaptability and success. It promotes and sublimates life and serves a means to achieve desired goals (20). In short, self-esteem is an important aspect of one's overall functions and actions. Self-esteem can be both the cause and effect of one type of performance achieved in another context (21). In the present study, self-esteem was identified as one of the characteristics of noble and efficient families in the region under study.

According to the interviews with the participants, behavioral control was divided into self-control and

patience. Accordingly, it can be suggested that optimistic emotions are positive emotions that can function as an effective therapeutic agent, leading to changes in family structure (22). On the other hand, unrealistic hopes and expectations can set the stage for failure in marital life. For people to succeed in their marital life, careful consideration of behavioral factors is essential, and individuals must be willing to follow the basic steps, such as those proposed by Watson and Tharp: 1) Setting goals, 2) Implementing goals in targeted behavior, 3) Self-control, 4) Planning for change, and 5) Evaluating the action plan (23). In such circumstances, a person is motivated to make changes in his or her life. The present study also showed that healthy families have positive characteristics about controlling their emotions and teaching their members how to deal with problems, leading to hope and optimism about the future.

Having patience enhances a person's inner strength and increases his or her efficiency in different areas of life (24). One of the issues in positive psychology is resilience that has a special place in psychology and particularly social psychology (25). Resilience is a phenomenon that results from a person's natural adaptive responses that, despite facing serious threats, enables them to achieve success and overcome threats. Resilience is not merely passive resistance against harms or threatening conditions but a resilient person is an active participant and constructor of the environment around him or her. Resilience is a person's ability to establish biological, psychological and spiritual balance against risky conditions (26). Therefore, it cannot be regarded as equivalent to recovery because recovery means a person's return to the original state after experiencing negative consequences (27). The present study showed that one of the components of healthy families is self-control and self-management of their emotions.

Bashirian et al. used the theory of planned behavior to predict factors affecting adolescent substance use and concluded that health education theories could assist in predicting planning to change high-risk behaviors. Besides, the planned theory can be used effectively to plan and can intervene to prevent

substance abuse in adolescents (8).

In this study, the theory of planned behavior was employed to develop a model that can contribute to the consolidation of family foundations. Accordingly, 4 main themes and 8 sub-themes for family education and therapy were identified. Numerous findings from family studies have led to different theories. These conceptual and theoretical models have been refined and described in articles. Therefore, given the existence of multiple models, it is necessary to find a practical model for each community. In this study, it was attempted to develop a local model for use in Yazd Province as a region with a high number of religious people. Therefore, therapeutic recommendations and practices should be based on people's beliefs and religious practices. Accordingly, building upon a theory of western origin, a model was proposed that can account for family stability by taking into account the living conditions of inhabitants in the region under study.

Since the present study used a qualitative method, all the limitations of qualitative research including researcher bias, validity issue, and generalizability problems apply to its findings.

Conclusion

Family stability drives society toward desirable ideals. Accordingly, young people should be encouraged to get married as soon as they meet the requirements for marriage. They also should be trained on how to strengthen their family life. This study proposed a model that can be used for educating families who have different problems. It can be also a valuable tool for family therapists and family professionals dealing with family issues.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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