LETTER TO EDITOR

Construction and Development of an Asian Family Scale: The Path and Importance of the Effort

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The escalation in the aspect of social ills especially among Malaysian teenagers in the recent decade has evoked our interest in the need to look at the family dynamic. High prevalence of drug abuse, conduct misacts, truancy, teenage pregnancy and promiscuous behaviour, is the main indicator on the need to conduct family studies.

In Malaysia and generally in Asia, there is no validated family scale that we can use for the purpose of family assessment. The area of child psychology, sociology, family planning and general psychiatry would benefit from this effort. Hence it is important to initiate the effort to establish a validated family scale for our population.

The effort was started in 2006 when a team comprising of researchers from universities and Ministry of Health Malaysia (MOH) tried to adapt the Family Environment Scale (FES) for Malaysian population. The project, namely “Cross-Cultural Adaptation and Validation of Bahasa Melayu Version of The Family Environment Scale (FES) Questionnaire” was financially supported by MOH and Clinical Research Centre Grant. In this endeavour, we translated FES into a Malaysian language and studied the psychometric properties of the translated version. Unfortunately the results obtained were unsatisfactory even though the translation was done strictly according to the guidelines. Retrospective analysis showed that the translation was done properly and the underlying reason for poor outcome was caused by the content factor.

Further analysis proved the concept of Asian family is different from the western. As an example, the ability to express unhappiness to family members is viewed as good in FES but not in Asia. Items in Expressiveness, Independence and Achievement orientation domains resulted in poor factor loadings. Adapting and translating of an existing scale such as from western is an easy approach to establish a validated instrument, but it is not applicable in in the context of family scales.

Hence the need to devise a new scale comes into the picture. In 2011, the effort started and the study was funded by Fundamental Research Grant Scheme. The process consists of 6 stages; domains identification, items identification for each domain, language review, pre-test, pilot study and finally actual validation. The validation stage was rather challenging because we need to take into consideration that there are 3 major ethnic groups with different mother tongues in Malaysia.

The scale consists of 6 domains with 5 items in each domain which gives rise to 30 items in total. In general the psychometric
outcomes are good. The details of the study outcomes will be published upon completion of patent process. The scale is comprehensive and very much tailored to Asian context which emphasizes the traditional and religiosity practices.

Both Malay language and English versions are now ready to be used by any researchers in Malaysia and in Asian region. Further studies are needed to further establish its psychometric properties in different populations in Asia. Further enquiries on the scale can be found at www.iium.edu.my/medicine/mahir.

References


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