

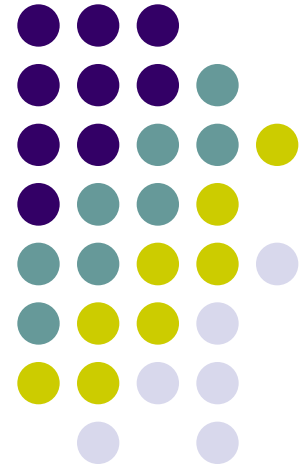
[MSW-II; Unit-I]

Family Functioning: CIRCUMPLEX MODEL OF MARITAL & FAMILY SYSTEMS



SWRK 4023: Working with Families and Children

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CIRCUMPLEX MODEL OF MARITAL & FAMILY SYSTEMS

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Family Functioning: Meaning & Scope



- “**Family functioning**, on the other hand, refers to the **roles** family members play and the **attitudes and behaviors** they exhibit in their relationships with each other.”
- (Ref: Encyclopedia of Human Relationships, pp-621)
- There are a **range of frameworks** that have been developed for understanding it. A few have already been discussed in the first PPT on family functioning.
- Here special emphasis is made on the 2 models:
 - (i) **Circumplex Model** of Marital and Family Systems and
 - (ii) **McMaster Model**

Family Functioning & Social Work Intervention



- Professional social work is all about diagnosis and intervention in the case of problems faced by clients – individuals, families, groups and communities.
- However, studying a family – its structure and functioning, is a challenging task since the truth is often held back and everything happens behind closed doors.
- The family environment is intimate and outsiders are not invited.

Family Functioning & Social Work Intervention



- The task of studying a family becomes even more difficult when certain events that happen within the family are considered stigmatized and problematic. Members do not tell the truth or are dissuaded from revealing the truth.
- When observed or under scrutiny, members tend to pose or act as if everything is normal, unless things cross the coping limits.
- Theoreticians have developed various models for studying families and marital relationships among which the **Circumplex Model** & the **McMaster Model** stand out.
- These two models have been extensively used by family therapists to study and develop intervention plans for the whole family as a whole which is in distress and/individuals individual members or couples who face psychosocial challenges.

Family Functioning:

Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems



- The Circumplex Model draws on and summarizes the variety of studies undertaken by researchers and theoreticians.
- The value and importance of the three dimensions – cohesion, flexibility & communication - indicated by Olson and his team have been accepted by majority of researchers & practitioners over the past 3-4 decades.

Let us now discuss about the various dimensions in detail which is provided in the following slides

Family Functioning:

Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems



- **David H. Olson and his colleagues** created the Family Circumplex Model which has its origins in the family systems theories.
- It uses **Couple and Family Maps** which is a framework to describe how families function.
- This model is particularly useful in “**relational diagnosis**” to understand how problems in families are created from an systems perspective.
- This model uses **three broad aspects/dimensions** to understand how a family functions and can help describe marital and family dynamics:
 - Cohesion
 - Flexibility
 - Communication

Circumplex Model



Dimension-1: Marital and Family COHESION (Togetherness)

- Family cohesion refers to *“the emotional bonding that family members have towards one another”*.
- **Family Cohesion** is identified in the form of a diversity of variables viz. emotional bonding, relational boundaries, coalitions, time, personal space, friends, decision-making, interests and recreation.
- **Olson et al** have identified **four levels of cohesion** and assess the functioning of the family in terms of a mix or combination of these:
 - **Disengaged** (very low)
 - **Separated** (low to moderate)
 - **Connected** (moderate to high)
 - **Enmeshed** (very high)

Circumplex Model



Dimension-1: Marital and Family COHESION (Togetherness)

- It is proposed that those families whose functioning has been found to fall in the **extremes (or unbalanced areas)** i.e **disengaged & enmeshed**, have been found to be facing problems due to too much of flexibility/independence (**disengaged**) or too much of consensus & rigidity and too little independence (**enmeshed**).
- Diagnosis of problems in the family and in strained marital relationships thus has to find answers to the problems in terms of disengaged or enmeshed relationships after a thorough study through a participatory process. They are then advised to undergo **therapy**.

Continued....

Circumplex Model



Dimension-1: Marital and Family COHESION (Togetherness)

Separated & Connected Relationships

- It is said that those families which maintain a limited degree of freedom (**separated but not disengaged**) and remain **connected** but are not over-possessive of their relationships continue to maintain a healthy family environment where individuals **enjoy independence** and also follow the **shared norms** of the family.
- Such couples and family systems tend to be more functional across the life-cycle and are able to respect one another and also fulfill the respective roles & functions as mutually agreed upon.

Continued....

Circumplex Model



Dimension-1: Marital and Family COHESION (Togetherness)

- In such relationships there may be common friends and responsibilities but at the same time individuals have the freedom to have separate friend circles and may involve in different activities as per their individual interest too.
- A **connected relationship** has emotional closeness and loyalty to the relationship. There is an **emphasis on togetherness**.

Continued....

Circumplex Model



Dimension-1: Marital and Family COHESION (Togetherness)

Disengaged & Enmeshed Relationships

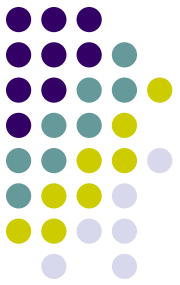
(1) Disengaged Relationship: In a disengaged relationship there is extreme emotional separateness – do not interfere in each others issues and interests, demand separate space/freedom, and are unable to support one another when in need (lack of empathy).

(2) Enmeshed relationship: In the other extreme, in an enmeshed relationship, there is extreme closeness and loyalty is demanded.

- friendships outside the family are discouraged and they are engaged/involved in very little outside activities or interests.
- but as time passes, members then tend to feel suffocated in such relationships which may ultimately result in frequent conflict among couples/family members and may lead to separation or divorce.

Circumplex Model

Dimension-2: Marital and Family FLEXIBILITY



- **Family flexibility** refers to the dynamism in relationship that exists in the family or in other words, the amount of change in its leadership, role relationships and relationship rules.
- Leadership is represented by control & discipline, negotiation styles
- The focus here is to maintain a balance between **stability** and **change**.
- The **four levels of FLEXIBILITY** range from *rigid* (very low) to *structured* (low to moderate) to *flexible* (moderate to high) to *chaotic* (very high).
- Similar to cohesion, it is hypothesized that central or balanced levels of flexibility (**structured & flexible**) are more conducive to stable married life and proper family functioning.

Circumplex Model

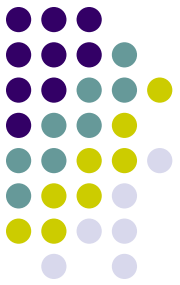
Dimension-2: Marital and Family FLEXIBILITY



- Likewise, extreme characteristics (**rigid** & **chaotic**) seen in a family often has led to problems in the family marked by conflicts and inability to achieve distinct milestones during the family's life-cycle.
- In a **rigid relationship** a single individual is in charge and controls every thing. Decisions are imposed and there can be no negotiation. Roles are defined and rules cannot be changed.
- A **chaotic relationship** is characterized by erratic and limited leadership. Decisions are impulsive and not well thought out. Rules are not clear and can change from person to person.

Circumplex Model

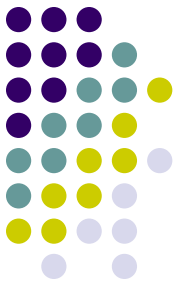
Dimension-2: Marital and Family FLEXIBILITY



- On the other hand, **balanced couple & family systems** (**structured** & **flexible** types) tend to be more functional over time; have democratic & egalitarian leadership; roles are stable but sharing takes place if there is a need; participatory decision-making where the old and young too take active part; rule are age-appropriate but there is scope for change.
- The Circumplex Model proposes that very high levels of flexibility (**chaotic**) and very low levels of flexibility (**rigid**) to be problematic for individuals and relationship development in the long run.
- On the other hand, relationships which are **moderate**, **structured** and **flexible**, are able to balance change and stability in more functional ways.

Circumplex Model

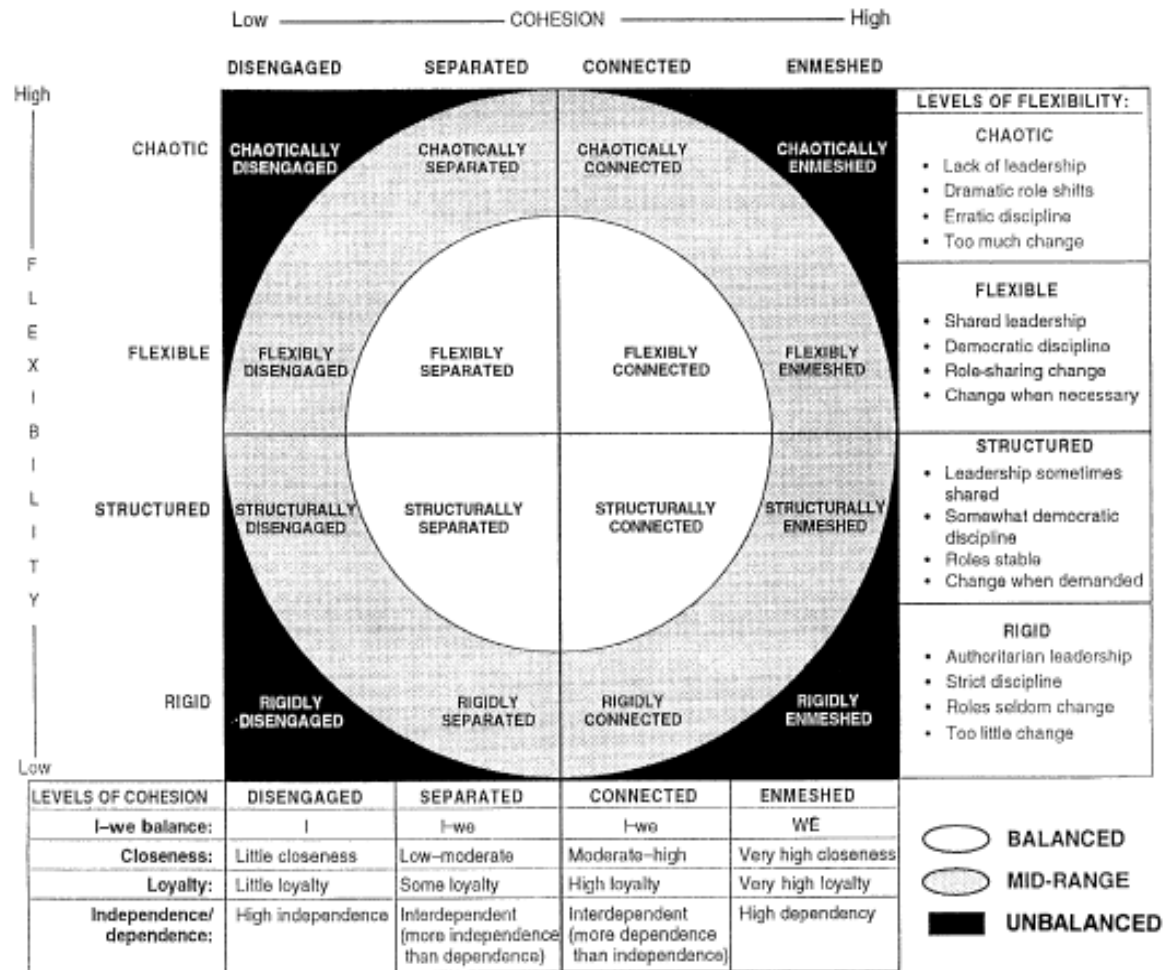
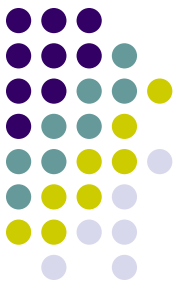
Dimension-3: COMMUNICATION



- Communication, the third dimension of the Circumplex Model, is said to be the grease that smoothes frictions between family members. It facilitates
- Communication is directly related to the strength of the couple and family relationships.
- Couple & family communication is measured by the presence of transparency, willingness to listen to the other, scope for speaking out one's likes & dislikes, self-disclosure in terms of sharing feelings about self and the relationship, ability to seek clarity, continuity tracking, participatory problem-solving and respect and regard .

Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems

Couple and Family Map



Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems



Some Hypotheses

- The Circumplex Model of family functioning tries to distinguish between **balanced & unbalanced** functioning of families.

Hypotheses related to the Circumplex Model:

- The basic **hypothesis** of the Family Circumplex Model is that families that are **balanced** (central areas of the model) i.e., exhibiting more of **cohesion & flexibility** tend to function better than families that are **unbalanced** (more extreme areas of the model) exhibiting either a highly **rigid** or **chaotic** family system .
- Another hypothesis is that balanced families tend to have **better communication** compared with unbalanced families.

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THANKS

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COVID-19

