



## Review Article

## Family Stigma: A Concept Analysis

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## SUMMARY

**Purpose:** Stigma negatively affects individuals as well as entire families; therefore, it is necessary to understand “family stigma” in order to reduce the social and emotional distress of families suffering from stigma and prevent the resulting avoidance of social support and treatment. Thus, this study clarifies the concept of “family stigma” by using concept analysis method.

**Methods:** In order to analyze the concept, we reviewed the relevant literatures. Characteristics that appeared repeatedly throughout the literature were noted and categorized.

**Results:** Three key defining attributes were identified: (a) others' negative perceptions, attitudes, emotions, and avoidant behaviors toward a family, because of the unusualness of the family, including the negative situations, events, behaviors, problems or diseases associated with that family, or because of the ordinary characteristics or structures of that family; (b) others' belief that the unusualness of the family is somehow harmful, dangerous, unhealthy, capable of affecting them negatively, or different from general social norms; and (c) others' belief that the family members are directly or indirectly contaminated by the problematic family member, so that every family member is also considered as harmful, dangerous, unhealthy, capable of having a negative effect on others, or different from general social norms.

**Conclusion:** The results of this study are expected not only to guide future research but also to enhance family care in nursing practice.

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## Introduction

Stigma is a barrier that can prevent patients with mental illnesses from getting appropriate treatment or care (Cooper, Corrigan, & Watson, 2003). In fact, about 50%–60% of people with mental distress avoid treatment or care because of fear of being stigmatized (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2003). For this reason, many previous psychiatric studies have focused on stigmas related to mental disorders, especially those associated with schizophrenia, drug addiction and such (Corrigan, Watson, & Miller, 2006). However, it is important for nurses to understand that patients with mental disorders are not the only people who suffer from stigma. In fact, many people suffer from stigma with reasons varying from person to person (Mwinituo & Mill, 2006). More importantly, because of the fear of being stigmatized, such people tend to be avoid interpersonal relations and isolate themselves from society (Lefley, 1989); moreover, they often lack support

and medical care because of their stigma. Health professionals, including nurses, can also express negative attitudes or have negative stereotypes because of stigma, which could lead them to disrespect those afflicted, hindering trust and rapport between health professionals and their patients (Mwinituo & Mill, 2006).

More importantly, stigma is not limited to the individuals experiencing it directly; family members associated with those individuals can also be affected (Lefley, 1989). Thus, it is essential for health professionals to better understand this phenomenon, especially with regard to how it affects a family unit. Nonetheless, there has been a lack of agreement on the definition regarding family stigma so far, even though a number of studies have examined families' stigmatization experiences. However, it is important to clarify family stigma as a concept so that its theoretical and practical aspects can be better studied. This, in turn, could lead to the development of research tools for measuring it. For this reason, in this study, we analyzed the aspects of family stigma by using the concept analysis method (Walker & Avant, 2005).

Concept analysis is a method for deriving precise theoretical and operational definitions of certain words, terms or symbols by clarifying their constituent properties. This method differs from

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other strategies, such as concept synthesis or concept derivation; concept synthesis refers to the method of developing new concepts, while concept derivation refers to the translation of concepts across disciplines (Rodgers & Knaf, 2000; Walker & Avant, 2005). Since the concept of family stigma is neither a wholly new concept nor a concept originating from another discipline, we deemed concept analysis the most appropriate method. Therefore, we used concept analysis in order to clarify the meaning of the term “family stigma”.

As mentioned above, family stigma is not a new concept. However, no previous study has attempted to describe its attributes or to define it precisely. Furthermore, no study in the nursing field has explored it as a concept. There are, however, two previous studies that explored concepts related to family stigma. First, Lee and Lee (2006) used concept analysis to clarify “stigma” as used by Walker and Avant (2005). According to their results, stigma has four attributes: “devaluing”, “labeling”, “negative stereotypes”, and “discrimination”. However, their study focused on stigma as experienced by individuals, and did not consider how it affected families. Second, Larson and Corrigan (2008) did study family stigma, but only focused on families in which a member had some form of mental illness.

To fill this gap, the present study defined general family stigma and examined its characteristics by using the concept analysis method described by Walker and Avant (2005). A literature review was used to define the concept. In addition, this study investigates the antecedents, attributes, consequences, and empirical referents of family stigma. Finally, three case studies—model, borderline, and contrary cases—are provided to better elucidate the concept of family stigma.

## Methods

### Study design: A concept analysis

Concept analysis is a way of examining the structure and function of specific concepts, allowing us to clarify and refine ambiguous concepts in nursing theories. Thus, concept analysis is important and useful for theorists in constructing relationships between concepts, as well as hypotheses and instruments for researching these concepts (Walker & Avant, 2005). There are three major approaches to analyzing concepts, all of which are derived from Wilson's method (1963): Walker and Avant (1983, 1988, 1994), Chinn and Jacobs (1983, 1987), and Chinn and Kramer (1991). These approaches are somewhat different in terms of the steps and the ordering of the analytic process. We employed the method developed by Walker and Avant; unlike Chinn and Kramer's method, which emphasizes various contexts and situations to determine the nature of the concept, Walker and Avant's method elucidates the concept by providing antecedents, consequences, and empirical referents (Hupcey, Morse, Lenz, & Tasón, 1996; Rodgers & Knaf, 2000; Walker & Avant).

The specific procedures for this method are listed as follows:

- (a) Select the concept to be analyzed.
- (b) Determine the aim and purpose of the study.
- (c) Identify all uses of the concept.
- (d) Determine the defining attributes of the concept.
- (e) Construct model cases illustrating this concept.
- (f) Construct additional cases, including borderline, related, contrary, invented, and illegitimate cases.
- (g) Identify the antecedents and consequences of the concept.
- (h) Identify empirical referents.

However, according to Walker and Avant (2005), even though they provided eight steps that seems sequential for analyzing the

concept, in fact the steps can be iterative. In other words, it can be flexible in terms of its analysis procedure. In addition, many previous studies that used the Walker and Avant method also showed flexibility in arranging the steps and laying out the results (Brush, Kirk, Gultekin, & Baiardi, 2011; Gray & White, 2012). Thus, in this paper, we show family stigma in sequence of antecedents, attributes and consequences for readers' ease of understanding. Also, we provide a model case and additional cases. Specific layout of this paper is as the following:

- (a) Select the concept to be analyzed.
- (b) Determine the aim and purpose of the study.
- (c) Identify all uses of the concept.
- (d) Identify antecedents of the concept.
- (e) Identify attributes of the concept.
- (f) Identify consequences of the concept.
- (g) Identify empirical referents.
- (h) Construct a model case illustrating this concept.
- (i) Construct additional cases, including borderline and contrary cases.

### Data collection

A literature review was conducted to define the concept “family stigma”. To find the relevant literature, we used three online databases: CINAHL, PsycINFO, and PubMed. We limited our search to studies published between January 1985 and December 2012. These literature databases were searched using the keywords “family stigma”. In the case of PubMed, we used a combinations of MeSH terms—“attitude”, “social stigma”, “family stigma”, and “stereotyping”. If the studies did not include familial aspect of stigma or if the studies were written in languages other than English or Korean, those studies were not reviewed. Specific procedures for data collection are illustrated in Figure 1.

### Data analysis

Relevant studies were screened and then read in detail. Characteristics of family stigma that appeared repeatedly throughout the literature were recorded and categorized into antecedents, attributes, and consequences. Studies were continuously read until achieving informational saturation. As a result, a total of 16 relevant studies were reviewed. Information from reviewed studies contributed to the final decisions for antecedents, the cluster of attributes and consequences.

## Results

### Definitions and use of the concept “family stigma”

Walker and Avant (2005) recommended using dictionaries, thesauruses, and any possible literature to identify the use of the concept. However, the word “family stigma” could not be found in either the dictionary or Wikipedia. Thus, we searched for “stigma” in general. According to *The American Heritage Dictionary* (2012), stigma is “an association of disgrace or public disapproval with something, such as an action or condition”. It is derived from the Latin *stigma* or *stigmat-*, meaning “tattoo mark” or “indicating slave or criminal status”. According to *Nisus Thesaurus*, synonyms of stigma are “brand”, “mark”, and “stain”. The word “brand” is defined as “a name given to a product or service”, “mark” is “a distinguishing symbol”, and “stain” is defined as “a symbol of disgrace or infamy” (*Nisus Thesaurus*, 2006). Moreover, the word “stigma” has various definitions according to different disciplines.

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