



## Family sense of coherence and family and marital functioning across the perinatal period



Fei-Wan Ngai <sup>a,\*</sup>, Siew-Fei Ngu <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of Nursing, The Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine, The University of Hong Kong, Room 417, 4/F, William M W Mong Block, 21 Sassoon Road, Pokfulam, Hong Kong

<sup>b</sup> Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Queen Mary Hospital, Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine, 6/F, William MW Mong Block, 21 Sassoon Road, Pokfulam, Hong Kong

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 31 March 2015

Revised 27 October 2015

Accepted 3 November 2015

#### Keywords:

Family functioning

Family sense of coherence

Postpartum

Pregnancy

### ABSTRACT

**Background:** A family sense of coherence is central to successfully coping with family stressors and facilitates positive adaptation. Little is known about the implications of family sense of coherence for family adaptation during the transition to parenthood.

**Objective:** The objective of this study was to examine the role of family sense of coherence in family and marital functioning during the perinatal period.

**Methods:** The study used a longitudinal design. A convenience sample of 202 Chinese childbearing couples completed the Medical Outcomes Study Family and Marital Functioning Measures and Family Sense of Coherence Scale during pregnancy, at 6 weeks and at 6 months postpartum.

**Results:** The results showed that the couples experienced a substantial decline in family and marital functioning postpartum and that a strong family sense of coherence was associated with better family and marital functioning in the perinatal period. The levels of family sense of coherence for both mothers and fathers were fairly stable across the perinatal period.

**Conclusion:** The study provides evidence that family sense of coherence plays a significant role in promoting family and marital functioning during the transition to parenthood.

© 2015 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

### Introduction

New parenthood brings a marked transformation in a couple's life [1]. A potential change that may affect the family system is the quality of family and marital functioning [2]. Family and marital functioning refers to the quality of interactions among family members [2], which has far-reaching impacts on parental health and the psychosocial development of the child [3,4]. Numerous studies have found that new parenthood is accompanied by a decrease in the quality of family and marital functioning [5–7]. Lawrence et al. [5] conducted a longitudinal study of 156 American parent and non-parent couples, and found that the transition to parenthood was associated with a greater decline in marital satisfaction for parent than for non-parent couples, from the prenatal period through to 12 months postpartum. In another longitudinal study in the United States, involving 218 couples, Doss et al. [6] found that the delivery of a newborn child had an adverse effect on marital relationship, and that the changes were more sudden and persistent among parents

than non-parents. In a systematic review of 37 prospective studies assessing relationship satisfaction among first-time expectant parents pre- and post-natally, Mitnick et al. [7] concluded that both men and women experienced significant declines in satisfaction from pregnancy to postpartum with a small to medium effect.

Studies revealed that the decline in family and marital functioning were determined by multiple factors, such as the changing roles and responsibilities of spouses, the increase in family stress, and marital conflict, the decrease in positive spousal interaction, and feelings of chaos from combining childcare and the demands of household and workplace [8–11]. For some parents, the arrival of a newborn child also gives them pleasure and a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction in family and marital relationships [12]. The way in which couples cope with parental stress can help alleviate or aggravate the impact of the transition on the quality of family and marital functioning [12].

According to McCubbin and Patterson [13], the family system's resources can make it less vulnerable to stressors and better able to adapt to major crises. One of the coping resources that can potentially affect how couples adapt to the transition is the family sense of coherence [14], originating in the Salutogenic Model, which seeks to explain why people remain healthy during times of extremely stressful conditions [15]. Antonovsky and Sourani [14] defined family sense of coherence as a global family orientation that the

\* Corresponding author. School of Nursing, The Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine, The University of Hong Kong, Room 417, 4/F, William M W Mong Block, 21 Sassoon Road, Pokfulam, Hong Kong. Tel.: +852 29192628.

E-mail address: [fwngai@hku.hk](mailto:fwngai@hku.hk) (F.-W. Ngai).

environment is structured, predictable and explicable (comprehensible), resources are available to meet demands (manageable) and demands are challenges and worthy of investment (meaningful). During parental transition, family sense of coherence represents the degree to which the couples see their family worldview as coherent [14]. According to Antonovsky and Sourani [14], a strong sense of family coherence, in particular one shared by couples, provides the perceptual, motivational, and behavioural basis for successful adaptation to parental demands. In this way, they have a better sense of family and marital satisfaction. In a study of 116 families with children having mental illness in the United States, family sense of coherence was found to positively predict family functioning and adaptation, explaining 7% of the total variance [16]. Another study conducted by Anderson [17] of 78 families with illness in the United States found that the family sense of coherence strongly predicted the quality of family life, accounting for over 30% of the variance. In a local study of 128 Chinese childbearing couples, Ngai and Ngu [18] found that couples with strong family sense of coherence were more satisfied with their family functioning and marital relationship. The evidence indicates that family sense of coherence has a potential influence on their ability to deal with stressors, thus enhancing the quality of family functioning and marital relationship across parental transition.

Although there has been considerable research into family and marital functioning during parental transition, little is known about the impact of family sense of coherence on family functioning across the perinatal period. Knowledge of the influence of family sense of coherence on family and marital functioning in the context of Chinese parenthood would inform the design of culturally competent care to facilitate positive adjustment and enhancement of family well-being. The aims of this study were therefore: (a) to examine the changes in family and marital functioning and family sense of coherence among Chinese couples during pregnancy and at 6 weeks and 6 months postpartum; and (b) to examine the relationship between family sense of coherence and family and marital functioning in the perinatal period.

## Methods

### *Design and sample*

The study was part of a longitudinal study which explored the influence of psychosocial variables on family adaptation during parental transition. A total sample of 256 childbearing couples was recruited between January and May 2011 at the antenatal clinic of a public hospital. The inclusion criteria were child-bearing couples aged 18 or above, able to read Chinese and no past or family history of psychiatric illness. After obtaining ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Hong Kong/Hospital Authority Hong Kong West Cluster, the research team determined couples' eligibility from their antenatal records and approached those who met the inclusion criteria during their antenatal visits. The purpose and procedures of the study were explained to the couples and those who agreed to participate signed a written consent. Couples were asked to complete the Medical Outcomes Study Family and Marital Functioning Measures (MOS-FMFM) and the Family Sense of Coherence Scale Short Form (FSOC-S) at the antenatal clinics and again at 6 weeks and 6 months postpartum, when the questionnaires were sent by post.

## Measures

### *Family and marital functioning*

The MOS-FMFM is a 10-item scale used to measure satisfaction with family life (FFM), overall happiness with family life, and

marital functioning (MFM) [2]. The FFM and MFM are rated on 5-point scales, and overall happiness with family life on a 6-point scale. Scores range from 10 to 51, with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction with family life and marital functioning. Examples of items are "We said anything we wanted to say to each other" and "My spouse or partner was supportive of me". The Chinese MOS-FMFM has been validated with Chinese childbearing couples with good internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.79$ ) and test-retest reliability ( $r = 0.74$ ). Construct validity was supported by significant correlations with social support and anxiety [19]. The internal consistencies in the present study were 0.78 and 0.77, respectively, for mothers and fathers.

### *Family sense of coherence*

The FSOC-S is a 12-item scale used to assess the extent to which the family perceives the environment as meaningful, comprehensible and manageable [20]. Each item is scored on a 7-point scale. Scores range from 12 to 84, with higher scores indicating a stronger perception of family life coherence. The FSOC-S has good internal consistency of 0.81 [20]. The Chinese FSOC-S has been validated with Chinese childbearing couples with good internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ), and test-retest reliability ( $r = 0.75$ ). Construct validity was supported by significant correlations with sense of coherence, social support and anxiety [18]. The internal consistencies in the present study were 0.87 and 0.83, respectively, for mothers and fathers.

### *Data analysis*

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 18.0 was used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise baseline characteristics. Univariate repeated measures analyses of variance (ANOVA) were employed to determine changes in family and marital functioning and family sense of coherence across the perinatal period. Repeated time contrasts were conducted to examine differences between the mean family and marital functioning scores from pregnancy to 6 weeks and 6 months postpartum. Differences between the couples' mean scores on family and marital functioning and family sense of coherence across the perinatal period were examined by paired t-tests. Pearson's product-moment correlations were conducted to examine the relationships between the study variables across the perinatal period.

## Results

### *Sample characteristics*

Of the 256 couples who completed the assessment during pregnancy, 202 (78.9%) completed both assessments at 6 weeks and 6 months postpartum. The mean age of the couples was 33.4 (SD = 4.6) and over 84% were first-time parents. Most (99.8%) had a secondary school or university level of education. Over 80% of the women and all husbands were employed. The median family income was HK\$34,571 (US\$4432) per month. The baseline characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 1.

### *Changes in family and marital functioning*

The mean family and marital functioning scores are set out in Table 2. The ANOVA revealed significant mean differences in family and marital functioning across the perinatal period in both the sub-groups of mothers,  $F(2, 402) = 52.8, p < 0.001$ , and fathers,  $F(2, 402) = 38.9, p < 0.001$  (Fig. 1). Repeated time contrasts showed that the family and marital functioning score declined significantly from pregnancy to 6 weeks postpartum in both the sub-groups of mothers,  $F(1, 201) = 76.9, p < 0.001$ , and fathers,  $F(1, 201) = 56.3, p < 0.001$ . It

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5866087>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5866087>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)