

Family Support: A Concept Analysis

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Abstract: Although family support is a widely used concept, its meaning is still ambiguous and confusing with other terms related to social support. From a literature review, family support has not been found to have undergone a concept analysis. This article aimed to clarify the meanings of the family support concept and to generate an operational definition of this term that could be used in research. A literature search was undertaken using various databases and using Walker and Avant's method of concept analysis. Keywords used in the search were: family, support, family support, and concept analysis of family support. Twenty-nine studies in English were selected for the analysis.

Three critical attributes of family support arose from the analysis comprising assistance provided by the family to members in need, multidimensional aspects including emotional, instrumental, and informational, and a reciprocal relationship between a giver and a receiver. Borderline, related, and contrary cases are presented to differentiate family support from others. Antecedents of the concept include family relationship, stressful life events, and limited capacity, whereas the consequences include family functioning, adaptation, adherence to disease management, and quality of life. Understanding this concept can help health professionals measure the concept precisely and apply for research in the population that needs support from the family to promote desirable outcomes.

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Introduction

The concept of family support is well known in many disciplines of knowledge. Even though it is acknowledged, a prior study claimed that the concept was new in terms of health services.¹ The concept is usually used when people live with chronic diseases, i.e., stroke, heart failure, HIV/AIDS, and disabilities. This concept is also familiarly used in psychiatric settings when a person has a mental disorder like depression. The concept of family support represents multifarious links, so explaining the definition and measuring accurately is difficult.

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According to previous studies, the meaning of family support is still ambiguous in the social support concept.^{2,3,4} The term "family support" has been broadly used in many areas, so the actual meaning is vague, and separating them can be problematic.⁵ Family support highlights how to promote family values and goals by facilitating, providing, and encouraging family members in order to accomplish family needs.⁶ In the literature, two meanings of family support can be identified, i.e., support from family to

a member of the family in need and support given by others to the family.^{7,8} The first meaning is in line with usefulness of the concept in any field of study and a culture in which support is mainly provided by members of family based on their beliefs and values.⁹ In Asian countries, the family is the main source of support for individuals with limitations, while other sources are not obvious.¹⁰ However, in western countries, sources of support may be more diverse such as family, friends, government, and professionals relying on the context.⁸ In addition, the meaning of concept is potentially related to other concepts, for example, family caregiver, so, it is difficult to measure the concept sensitive to different populations and cultures. Moreover, a concept analysis on this concept has never been found in any reviews. Despite studies by previous authors, none of their publications included an analysis of the concept. The present study focused more on the support from the family to a member in need.

The current study's aim is to clarify the meanings of the concept of family support and provide a distinction of the concept from other related concepts. When the meaning of the concept of family support is clarified clearly, it could prove useful to formulate a measurement tool of the concept, thereby providing its operational definition for future research and nursing practice.

Method

The Walker and Avant's approach was used and involved the process of examining the concept of family support.¹¹ The definitions of family support in the literature were identified, determining attributes and cases (model, borderline, related, and contrary) were discussed, followed by identifying antecedents and consequences of family support. At the final step, the empirical referents were presented to clarify how to measure family support. A literature search was conducted using various sources including ProQuest, EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, Dictionary.com and Cengage with terms 'family,' 'support,' 'family support' and 'concept analysis of family support' as keywords. The criteria used in the selection of publications

included articles published in English between 2008 and 2019 and involving both quantitative and qualitative studies. Publications were excluded when they were not within the context of the support from family to their members in need. When the relevant abstracts were found and full texts were obtained, the authors screened and selected the most appropriate literature. After checking for duplication, 29 studies formed a basis for the concept analysis.

Uses of Family Support and Related Concepts

The definition of the term was explored with a search of online dictionaries. Each word requires several meanings to obtain the whole concept of family support. The definition of family is referred to as a) "a group consisting of two parents and their children living together as a unit," b) "a group of people related by blood or marriage,"¹² and c) "a group of people who are related to each other, especially a mother, a father and their children."¹³ The term of support from a dictionary is defined as a) "to help someone emotionally or in a practical way,"¹⁴ b) "bear all or part of the weight of or hold up," and c) "give assistance to, especially financial."¹² Therefore, family support is referred to as giving assistance, such as emotional, financial to individual living together as a family member.

Uses in Sociology

Family support refers to informal assistance for a family member or the provision of care to support a family member. Family support is not only provided by the family but also friends, social groups, professional agencies, and service providers including full or partial support.^{9,15,16} Devaney¹ discussed that family support is a set of activities that strengthen informal social links through integrated programs including community and private services. They are generally provided to families in their own homes and communities.

Uses in Psychology

Family support in psychology is related to informal support and help from family members

providing emotional or instrumental support. For instance, in the case of suicidal adolescents, their parents are the main supporters. Aldersey et al.⁷ pointed out that the family provides emotional, physical, material/instrumental, and informational needs. They spend time to share their feelings and accompany the adolescents to contact health care providers when needed. Those supports can make stronger family ties¹⁷ to avoid psychological detachments,^{7,8,18} and prevent suicide. Moreover, the support facilitated from a member of the family has a range of useful adaptive behaviors for gaining coping strategies, skills, and self-confidence.^{1,19}

Uses in Education

Support from family members in education focuses on the help of parents in the success of their children's learning. It can be illustrated by how much parents care about children's education and what kinds of support are delivered by parents. When parents form a good collaboration with their children's school, it influences their children's behavior to perform the proper abilities in the classroom to achieve educational goals, i.e., student's GPA score.¹

Uses in Health-Related Conditions

Among individuals living with chronic diseases, family support is essential to help those individuals cope. Family members assist by relating to information about the treatment, providing time for sharing about feelings, and preparing funds for disease treatments. Individuals including older people with chronic diseases such as diabetes mellitus, stroke, or hypertension, require support from many sources to enhance their daily needs. When they stay at home, family members provide assistance and support for them using strategic planning, goal setting, and problem-solving to increase their self-worth^{20,21} to perform self-management practices. Interestingly, in the case of older people living with disease, they receive support from their children as a payback. However, older people are not the only recipients of support, but they are also significant providers of support and financial transfers, as giving and receiving are often reciprocal.^{22,23,24}

For people with disability, it cannot be denied that they need support from family members in their

lifetime, particularly when the disability starts at an early age. Children reside with their family at home and the family assists them with all their activities of daily living. After receiving emotional support from a family member, such people may feel better than before, both physically and mentally. Specific support resources are thought to be helpful for families to adapt to their disability and disease.^{25,26}

In brief, the definition of family support is a helping hand provided by the family to a member in need. This help can be delivered by parents, and/or children including informational, emotional, and instrumental support. This support is gained as an interrelationship between parents and children or vice versa. At early age, children receive many kinds of support from their parents. When their parents become older, children have a responsibility to take care of them. In the context of individuals with chronic diseases and disability, the family serves as a frontline to provide support for them.

Critical Attributes

After reviewing the literature on family support, common attributes were extracted. The critical attributes of family support based on this analysis included assistance provided by family to members in need, multidimensional aspects including emotional, instrumental, and informational and demonstrating a reciprocal relationship between a giver and a receiver. Creating cases provides further explanation about which instances were included or excluded in the concept of family support.

Model Case

A model case should be a pure case of the concept and should exhibit all of the critical attributes. A clear example can help better understand the family support concept.¹¹

Mrs. Putu was aged 75 years with no income, residing with her husband and son's family in a small house in a rural area. She received a diagnosis of uncontrolled hypertension 5 years ago. Her family members always take care.

Her husband is very kind and available every time to listen to what she feels and he helps her to resolve her symptoms. Every two weeks, her son accompanies her to take medicines at the Primary Health Center and pays for the expenditure of treatment. His son told her what kind of activities and diet should be selected to perform for her health. Moreover, her daughter-in-law prepares low salt meals daily and helps her to fulfill daily needs. Mrs. Putu said, "I have a feeling of receiving from when I took care of my children when they were young. I am getting it back from them now and we are a family that cares for each other.

This model has all attributes of family support. The subject presents hypertension and needs assistance. Her family members including her husband, son, and daughter-in-law take care of her. They deliver support encompassing emotional, instrumental, and informational aspects. The assistance provided by family members at present and the help provided by the subject to her family members in the past are regarded as reciprocal.

Borderline Case

A borderline case comprises almost all of the attributes of a concept. However, one of them substantially differs.¹¹

Mr. Gede suffers from diabetes and resides alone in the village. He has only one daughter residing in the city with her family. Every month his daughter provides some food and clothes and every two months, she visits him at home. When he becomes sick, a neighbour comes to take care of him until his daughter visits him. He said that he misses his daughter and wants her to stay at home to accompany him to the hospital.

This case has not all attributes of the concept. The man living with diabetes needs assistance to resolve his problem. Even though his daughter gives some support for him, he thinks that he receives inadequate supports. He wants his daughter to stay with him. Further, the reciprocal relationship remains unclear in this case.

Related Case

A related case does not cover all of the critical attributes of the concept. However, it serves as an example that is closely related to the concept.¹¹

Mr. Ketut, aged 45 years, resided in a shelter with his wife and children one month ago. He had to move to the new residence because of a volcano eruption in his hometown. He stayed in a small barracks with his family and other refugees. The government of the district provided beds and toiletries, and a non-government organization (NGO) supplied some food and water. Sometimes a psychologist visited the shelter to conduct some activities to release his stress. Moreover, volunteers from the education department invited children to play and study together. Mr. Ketut and his wife spent their leisure time making handicrafts which could be sold to earn the money.

The case is described as disaster management. The critical attributes cannot be found in this case. The man experienced a disaster of a volcano eruption. He had to leave his house and hometown. He and his family resided in a shelter with other refugees. The government and NGOs provided what they needed, such as food, clothing, education for children, and consultation with a psychologist. This support did not come from the family.

Contrary Case

Walker and Avant¹¹ stated that a contrary case aids to prove the clarity of the concept's by presenting a case that does not reflect the concept.

Mr. Nyoman, 70 years old, resided with his son and daughter-in-law in the city. His son worked as a manager of a factory and the daughter-in-law worked as a bank teller. They went to the office in the early morning and returned home in the night every weekday and sometimes on the weekend. Every day, Mr. Nyoman cooked, washed clothes,

and went shopping by himself. He spent the weekend alone. Two years ago, he received a diagnosis of uncontrolled hypertension. He usually visits a clinic to meet the doctor and pays for the treatment by himself. His son and daughter-in-law were very busy in their work. They did not have time to talk or even to say hello to him. He felt his life was lonely and his family neglected him.

In this case no support or assistance was provided from family members. The man felt his life was lonely. Even though he resided with his family members, he did not receive any support from his son's family. The family member neglected him. They did not take care of him at all as the responsibility of children. This man usually fulfilled his needs by himself.

Antecedents

Antecedents are occurrences which must exist before the concept.¹¹ Three antecedents related to family support are identified in this section and are explained as follows.

The family relationship can be viewed as the antecedent of family support. The relationship is illustrated as to indicate how strong the connections were among family members. Children in the family have the main duty and responsibility of supporting their parents in their old age.^{17,27} In addition, Warner and colleagues conveyed that some stressful life events may require some support from the family.²⁸ For instance, stressful life events may include natural disaster, family members with chronic conditions, family members with a disability, and others with multiple chronic conditions.^{18,25,28} When a family member presents a disease, the role and function of the family can change. The family will perceive the sickness of the member in need, then support and assistance can be delivered from the family. While the family has a member living with a chronic disease such as diabetes mellitus or cancer, another member of the family

provides assistance and kinds of support to enhance and improve life.^{25,29} Furthermore, the limited capacity of individuals from illness and age-related changes reduce their functional abilities. Individuals living with a disease or multiple diseases require assistance from family members to provide care in everyday life.²⁵ The very young and older persons have needs supported by others especially family members to fulfill needs in their life.^{17,30}

Consequences

Determining the consequences of the occurrence of a concept helps to identify relationships and to guide advanced research on the concept.¹¹ A literature review on the family support concept was conducted to determine the consequences in this analysis. Some authors reported that increasing family support can enhance the family's quality of life, decrease family stress, and successfully achieve family functioning.^{7,18,25,31} Other studies discussed that when patients with chronic illnesses and disabilities receive appropriate support from their family, they can enhance their well-being, adhere to medical treatment of their disease, adapt positively, and increase their self-worth.^{21,23,32,33} Regarding education, adequate family support includes informational, instrumental, and emotional support that can increase self-confidence.²⁰

Empirical Referents

Empirical referents in a concept analysis demonstrate how the concept is presented in the phenomena and how they can be measured. Walker and Avant¹¹ suggested that empirical referents are not tools to measure the concept, but more precisely, are used to measure the critical attributes. Generally, measuring defining characteristics of family support in the literature usually involves questionnaires. A self-report assessment is one method to assess family support using an interview based on a questionnaire.

Family support has also been measured by the Family Support Scale using a Likert scale with a score for each option: “not available” to “extremely helpful.” Similarly, measuring the Perceived Family Support using a Likert scale is available to use in research.³⁴ Komjakraphan and colleagues developed the Thai Family Support Scale for Elderly Parents (TFSS-EP).⁹ However, those instruments mostly focused on individuals with special needs and older people. Some statements present some attributes for family support such as, ‘People in my family like to hear my thoughts,’ ‘I got help from my family to solve my problem’ and ‘I have a relative who I can call when I feel bad and never regret this behavior later.’ In addition, the in-depth interview method may be used in a qualitative study with questions created by the researcher. Prior researchers have created questions in their study for in-depth interviewing like “What is the role of the family in providing support and sharing responsibility for illness management?”²⁵ This question was open-ended, which allowed participants to freely describe the support that they received from family members related to their disease management. However, the observation

technique might be more objective to describe the support received from family members. This condition is commonly used in measuring the support from parents provided to their children with chronic conditions or the parenting process in childhood.^{35,36} In fact, it will be needed in any condition and not limited to a specific age group.

Conclusion

Concept analysis defines the meaning of family support as assistance from family members provided to one another related by marriage in terms of informational, emotional, and instrumental aspects reciprocally. Previous studies^{3,7} have used this concept in research and practice, but it remains ambiguous. The term family support has been used with different meanings and in diverse areas. These cases are constructed to present what constitutes or what does not constitute the concept and also, related concepts are presented in this analysis to provide a boundary of the concept’s meaning. Figure 1 summarizes the antecedents, critical attributes, consequences, and empirical referents of the family support concept.

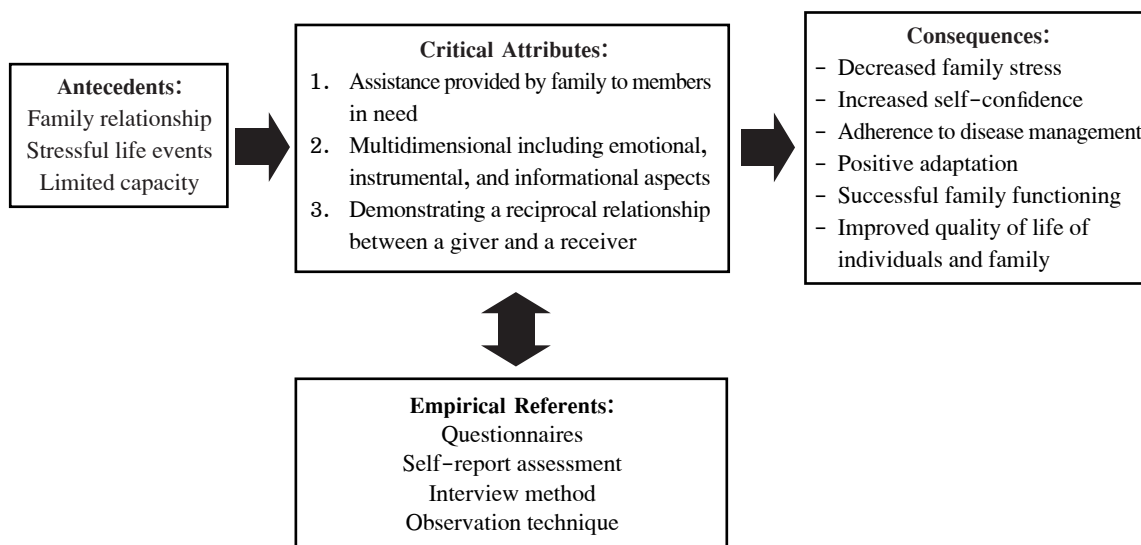


Figure 1. Family support: antecedents, critical attributes, consequences, and empirical referents

Limitations, Clinical Implication, and Recommendation

The articles used for the analysis were limited by the English language and so limiting the application of the research findings globally. Understanding the meaning of the family support concept provides direction for nurses and other health professionals in practice and research development. Because the concept provides aspects as the main source for individuals with problems in various contexts and involving Asian culture values particularly, health professionals can apply family support in health care practice to promote preferable outcomes. Additionally, its use as an instrument in research, health professionals can measure family support accurately. This analysis provides a fundamental part to formulate an operational definition for future research. It is recommended that additional studies explore and apply this concept in research projects to improve concept analyses of family support.

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Family Support: A Concept Analysis

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การสนับสนุนจากครอบครัว: การวิเคราะห์หัตถ์โนมตี

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บทคัดย่อ: ถึงแม้ว่าการสนับสนุนจากครอบครัวเป็นคำที่ใช้กันแพร่หลาย แต่ความหมายของคำนี้ยังคงคลุมเครือและสับสนกับคำศัพท์อื่น ๆ ที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการสนับสนุนทางสังคม จากการทบทวนวรรณกรรมยังไม่พบว่ามี การวิเคราะห์หัตถ์โนมตีของการสนับสนุนจากครอบครัว วัตถุประสงค์ของบทความนี้เพื่ออธิบายความหมายของการสนับสนุนจากครอบครัวและเพื่อพัฒนาคำนิยามของคำนี้เพื่อใช้ในการวิจัยต่อไป ในการวิเคราะห์หัตถ์โนมตีครั้งนี้ มีการค้นคว้าวรรณกรรมจากฐานข้อมูลที่หลากหลายและใช้วิธีการวิเคราะห์แนวคิดของวอลส์เกอร์และเอแวนท์ คำสำคัญที่ใช้ในการค้นหา ได้แก่ family, support, family support, และ concept analysis of family support พบวรรณกรรมที่เกี่ยวข้องในภาษาอังกฤษจำนวน 29 ฉบับที่เลือกใช้ในการวิเคราะห์หัตถ์โนมตีครั้งนี้

จากการวิเคราะห์พบว่า การสนับสนุนจากครอบครัวมีลักษณะสำคัญ 3 ประการ คือ ความช่วยเหลือจากครอบครัวต่อสมาชิกที่ต้องการ มีลักษณะพหุมิติซึ่งรวมถึงการสนับสนุนด้านอารมณ์ ด้านอุปกรณ์ สิ่งของต่าง ๆ และด้านข้อมูล ตลอดจนมีการแลกเปลี่ยนซึ่งกันและกันระหว่างผู้ให้และผู้รับ ผู้เขียนได้นำเสนอกรณีศึกษาที่แสดงถึงหัตถ์โนมตีที่เป็นกรณีต้นแบบ กรณีคาบเส้น กรณีที่มีลักษณะเกี่ยวข้อง และกรณีตรงกันข้ามเพื่อแยกความแตกต่างของการสนับสนุนจากครอบครัวจากหัตถ์โนมตีอื่น ๆ สิ่งที่เกิดขึ้นมาก่อนการสนับสนุนจากครอบครัว คือ สัมพันธภาพในครอบครัว เหตุการณ์ที่ตึงเครียดในชีวิต ความสามารถที่มีข้อจำกัด ในขณะที่ผลที่เกิดตามมาของหัตถ์โนมตีนี้ คือ การทำหน้าที่ตามบทบาทของครอบครัว การปรับตัว การปฏิบัติตามแผนการรักษาโรค และคุณภาพชีวิต การทำความเข้าใจหัตถ์โนมตีนี้จะช่วยทำให้บุคลากรวัดหรือประเมินหัตถ์โนมตีนี้ได้โดยตรงความหมายและสามารถประยุกต์ในงานวิจัยในกลุ่มประชากรที่ต้องการการสนับสนุนจากครอบครัวเพื่อส่งเสริมผลลัพธ์ที่พึงประสงค์

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คำสำคัญ: การวิเคราะห์หัตถ์โนมตี การสนับสนุนจากครอบครัว ความช่วยเหลือ พหุมิติ การแลกเปลี่ยนซึ่งกันและกัน

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