Critical Review of the Family Adaptability & Cohesion Scale: Gender, Culture, & Migration Status

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Purpose

This critical review investigated the FACES measure through a three-way comparison of documented studies:
1. Cross-cultural validation of FACES IV
2. Biological sex differences/similarities
3. Applied studies with refugee/migrant populations.

A synthesis of existing research will inform phase one of the larger mixed methods study of an exploratory validation of the FACES measure with a sample of Karen refugees from Burma.

Background

- Karen refugees from Burma comprise a rapidly expanding resettlement community in the United States. Karen migration history includes escape of violent ethnic conflict resulting in over one million people being forcibly displaced from their homes [1]
- Trauma research has found diminished neurobiological functioning in survivors, suggesting a potential for decreased engagement within families [2]
- As our research team prepares to develop and implement interventions to promote generational resilience within Karen families, this critical review of literature enhances depth of knowledge regarding the previous application and use of the FACES measure in family assessment.

Methods

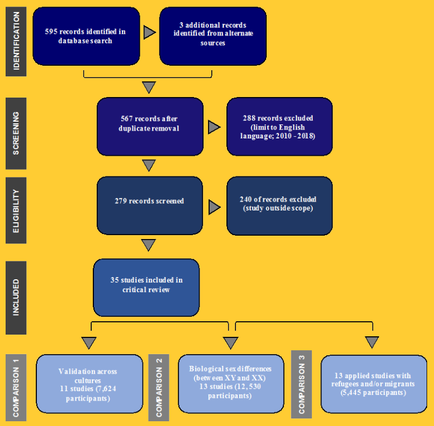
Databases utilized: Scopus, Google Scholar, Medline, HaPI, and PsychInfo.

Keywords: FACES II, FACES III, FACES IV, family adaptability and cohesion, validity, gender, male, female, and refugee.

Studies included in critical review assessed validation of FACES IV with diverse cultural samples, made gender comparisons within results, and applied FACES with refugee and/or migrant populations.

Results

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram



Source: Adapted from Moher et al. (2009) [4]

Results

Results highlight key findings from each of the three summary tables we used to organize the included studies.

Table 1

Cultural Relevance of FACES IV Subscales

- Italian version items 22 "family members have little need for friends outside the family" and 33 "family members seldom depend on each other" have less connection to Enmeshment and Disengagement scales represented by Italian cultural differences in which the boundaries between Cohesion and Enmeshment, as well as disengagement and autonomy show unstable and uncertain results; item 26 "we shift household responsibilities from person to person" is interpreted in Italian culture not as Flexibility but as Disengagement and Chaos
- Spanish version construct validity confirmed except for items 28 "we feel too connected to each other," 12 "it is hard to know who the leader is in our family," 30 "there is no leadership in our family," 32 "we have clear rules and roles in our family"
- Spanish version reviewed Rigidity dimension with clear, strict consequences regarded as positive.
- Portuguese version the Rigid subscale showed limitations and should be explored further.

Table 2

Maternal Factors and Child Adjustment

- Maternal distress significantly associated with internalizing among female adolescents but not male; maternal distress not associated with externalizing behaviors; family cohesion and peer attachment moderated the relationship between maternal distress and female adolescents' internalizing symptoms; maternal distress was linked to daughter's maladjustment/disrupted peer relationships
- Stronger associations found between maternal versus paternal mental health challenges and youth adjustment challenges; interpersonal relationships mediated the link between maternal and adolescent adjustment
- Parents with greater sense of community, engagement reported greater resiliency.; resiliency of mothers found to be of greater significance for increased youth well-being compared to fathers,; community engagement may have multigenerational implications

Table 3

Acculturative Stress and Familism [Refugee/Migrant Groups]

- Family cohesion, acculturative stress and social support accounted for 20% of variance in acculturative stress; greater levels of family engagement/family satisfaction correlated with lower acculturative stress levels.
- Significant positive correlation between acculturative stress and depression; positive correlation between hope and family cohesion; negative path coefficients found for acculturative stress and hope/family cohesion; acculturative stress and depression had a positive path coefficient; mediating effect of hope/family cohesion, relating to acculturative stress/depression
- Cohesion and anxiety found to be significantly inversely related, family cohesion explained 57% of variance in the trauma symptom inventory; significant inverse relationship between constructs of family strengths and trauma
- Prior research integrating the FACES measure included the following refugee/migrant groups: Latina/o, Korean, Vietnamese, Samoan, Hmong, African, North Korean, and Asian

Translation

Goal

Inform family centered intervention to interrupt intergenerational transmission of trauma.

Project Next Steps

- Larger and representative samples, with multiple family members
- Analyze FACES data collected from Karen maternal caregivers, integrate paternal caregiver FACES data to inform exploratory analysis
- Cohorts of wide age range could provide multigenerational insight and contribute to the development of a family-centered intervention
- Identify cross-cultural variations in Enmeshment, Rigidity, and Disengagement
- Explore gender differences in the perspectives of family adaptability and cohesion
- Explore the relationships between family functioning, youth adjustment, and torture/war trauma status of maternal caregivers

Future Considerations

- Longitudinal assessment of family systems in research and clinically
- Investigate individual, community factors, cultural norms, and values on FACES IV dimension scores
- Further consideration of gender differences in the relationships between refugee maternal and paternal caregivers and youth
- Investigate refugee family systems to increase understanding of cultural norms, rules, and values within families leading to meaningful changes in family interactions
- Implement social support community programming to help reduce acculturative stress/ depression through mediating effects of hope, motivation, and positive coping

Barriers to Translation

- Policy/programs that lead to prolonged separation of families, visa backlogs, detention, deportation
- Factors that decrease social safety net, restricted by limited English proficiency, disparities in health, education, and livelihood

Conclusion

- FACES IV confirmed to be a valid/reliable measure of family functioning across many cultural groups: Italian, Portuguese, Greek, Spanish, Hungarian and Romanian
- More research is needed to understand the unique variation within family systems, particularly among post-migration refugee and migrant communities
- Maternal mental health challenges were associated with adolescent maladjustment; meanwhile, interpersonal relationships had a mediating effect
- Hope/family cohesion had a mediating effect on acculturative stress/depression

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References

[1] Schweitzer, R., Melville, F., Steel, Z., & Lacherez Robert. (2006). Trauma, post-migration living difficulties, and social support as predictors of psychological adjustment in resettled Sudanese refugees. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, *40*(2), 179–187.

[2] Cisler, J. M., Steele, J. S., Smitherman, S., Lenow, J. K., & Kilts, C. D. (2013). Neural processing correlates of assaultive violence exposure and PTSD symptoms during implicit threat processing: a network-level analysis among adolescent girls. *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging*, *214*(3), 238-246.

[3] Poster design adapted from Shannon et al. (n.d.)

[4] Moher