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The Double ABC-X Model of Adjustment and Adaptation: An Appropriate Model for Studies in Family Stress and Coping Behaviour Theoretical Framework in Nigeria

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Abstract

There are advantages of combined high income, personal satisfaction, fulfillment and actualization, but the desired family cohesion of the family system is endangered sometimes with devastating social, emotional, psychological and physical implications between spouses and among family members. It is concern of educators, therefore, to proffer management techniques and support to spouses and families faced with stress and crisis. This can be effectively achieved through research findings of dual-career families and/or families with crisis-stressor and management situations. However, scholarly studies have bases usually, on conceptual, theoretical frameworks. There does not seem to be much scholarly studies done in Nigeria in the area of family resources which are based on an appropriate model/formular such as the Double ABC-X model. The paradigm shift of traditional family system as a result of women acquiring education and employed outside the home along with their male counterparts and/or spouse necessitate adjustments and adaptations which occur naturally. It is the purpose of this paper to introduce the history, content and context of the Double ABC-X model in order to expose academics to related discipline areas as an appropriate option for conceptual framework in research studies.

Keywords: Double ABC-X model, Adjustment, Adaptation, Vulnerability Regeneration, Crisis, Stress Coping Theory, Employed Housewives.

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, there seems to be a shift from traditional extended family to an industrially oriented family system which may have caused changes in domestic roles of both men and women. Acculturation of western, rather, foreign region family life patterns such as women working outside the home has resulted in conflicts between traditional family priorities related to women gainful employment outside the home. Although, there is dearth of statistical documentation about women participation in the labour force related to family stress and management techniques in Nigeria as in the case of some developed countries such as Britain, the United States, etc; separation, increasing infidelity and, more delinquent children have become glaringly more common and are causing serious concerns to parents, educators, government and the general public. Industrialization and modern technology have brought their problems, benefits not withstanding. These changes have caused the standard of living to increase and expectation of what one must own and consume have also increased. Hence, the need to

balance the lack of equilibrium caused by these demands. It is noteworthy; however, that industrialization has come to stay in Nigeria (Amfani-Joe, 1986).

Education of Nigerian women today is vital to family structure survival and improved living condition which presupposes that women who are adequately educated will engage in work outside the home while attempting to balance activities affected by changing lifestyle. This is phenomenal. Hence, the need arises to carry out studies that border on behaviour patterns of Nigerian career women/families in order to provide a comfort zone to ameliorate the predicament of combining stress/strains from home-making and career.

Changes in life such as increasing employment of women outside the home affects how family members feel, relate to each other and how they manage their home and other responsibilities. One of the results of these changes is stress, and management, thus, scholars have been led to develop theories of stress, crisis and coping strategies/mechanisms in families. This paper, therefore, discusses the Double ABC-X model of Adjustment and Adaptation as an appropriate tool for family stress, crisis and coping mechanism theoretical or conceptual framework for research in the Nigerian context.

Historical Background of Family Stress and Coping

Weber (2011) traced the history of stress theory which encapsulated both the individual and family stress theory as an evolution from the 1920s to this modern era. She identified that the individual stress theory emerged mainly from the subject area of psychology, sociology, psychiatry and anthropology, while the family stress theory emanated basically from sociology, psychiatry, social work, nursing and family science. The evolution and development of family stress theory spanned through four eras viz: 1920s to late 1940s marked the first era that began with graduate students studies in the 1940s. Angel (1936), of the Michigan University published his first studies on families followed by Cavan and Ranck, (1938), of the University of Chicago both of whom examined the effects of the great depression of the 1930son families. Then Boss (1987), studies on the families and individual added a building block on the development of the stress theory. The second era, late 1940s to late 1970s, set the theoretical works of Burr (1987), Hill (1949), and Koo's (1946) a sociologist who worked on family's profile of adjustment. Hill (1949, 1958) known as the father of stress theory development, developed the ABC-X model which became central to family stress theory at that time. Boss (1987), expressed that Hill (1958), made substantial contribution to scientific inquiry into family stress theory. The work led to the third era, late 1970s to mid 1980s with McCurbbim and Paterson (1982 and 1983), as forerunners. They expanded the ABC-X formula to develop the Double ABC-X model shifting from causes of stress to

family strengths, family system concepts and variables of maladaptation and bonadaptation.

This signaled the shift and development of family stress theory towards the fourth era to a more post modern focus on the processes, shared family meanings, culture, thereby context and family strengths which emerged as a typology of Family Adjustments and Adaptation Responses (FAAR). This was derived from the works of McCubbim and Paterson (1983), Paterson (1988), 1989, 1993 and 2002) and Paterson and Gatwick (1994). Further McCubbim and McCubbim (1991 and 1993) developed the post modern view of the resiliency model still based on the ABC-X formular of Hill (1949, 1958). Burr (1989), used the ecosystem theory to explain family stress after modifying and using Koo’s (1946) profile in troubled families to explain family experiences. Still, Boss (2002), used the ABC-X formular to develop the contextual model of family stress theory that considered culture which gave family stress an even post modern perspective. Culture defines a people, group or family, social norm and beliefs as a resource variable that form strong coping mechanisms. In another development, the ABC-X model showed itself yet, a useful tool in identifying components of its model on how families can successfully cope with stress drawing from the literature of the book of Philippians in the Bible. Wilmoth and Symster (2009), expressed that almost two millennium before Hill’s (1958), ABC-X model of family stress was conceived, the apostle Paul prestaged Hill’s (1958) balancing act model of family stress in his exaltation to the Philippians:

“Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God which transcends all hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6, 7 NIV)”.

Although, the ABC-X model was expounded throughout the epistle, each components can be identified in this brief admonition A (stress or event) = anything that might include anxiety, B (resources) = present request to God in prayer and petition; C (perception) = thanksgiving; X = (outcome) = peace of God, (Wilmoth and Symster, 2009) (Table 1)

Table 1: Analysis of the Epistle for Expounded ABC-X Model

Parameter	Component	Inference
A	Stress/Event	Anything that might include anxiety.
B	Resources	Present request to God in prayer and petition.
C	Perception	Thanksgiving
X	Outcome	Peace of God

Source: Modified Wilmoth and Symster (2009).

Copper and Dewe (2004) observed that although the formal study of how individuals and families adapt to stress in the family is fairly recent, the Book of Philippines illustrates strategies for responding to adversity that have been used for centuries, thereby providing a reframe while helping families view problems differently. These encourage them for proactive and production coping mechanism (Wilmoth and Symster, 2009). A family worldview that responds to stress efficaciously tend to include optimism and religiousness (Paterson and Gatwick, 2003).

X-raying Family Stress, Crisis and Coping Theories

Hill (1949), the leading component of a family stress theoretical framework was led to develop ABC-X model through his study of the effect of economic depression on families. Hill (1949), described the model as follows: A (the event) which interacts with B (the family's crisis – meeting resource) which in turn interacts with C (the definition of what the family makes of the event) to produce X (family crisis). Although this model did not explain explicitly which crisis situation were considered more severe than others, it formed the ground that provided insight into future studies. Burr's theory (1973), built upon Hill's ABC-X models in addition to Hansen and Hill's (1964) research on stress in attempt to update some proposition to explain behavior response to stress and crisis. Thus, Burr (1973), introduced the notions of family *vulnerability and regenerative* power. Vulnerability denotes variation in the ability of the family to prevent stress events due to change in social system while regeneration power is the variation in the ability of the family to recover from crisis. These concepts form the explanatory bases for how families are able to protect themselves against crisis or to recover from stress events.

McCubbin and Paterson (1982), further built upon Hill's (1949), and Burr's (1973), theories to develop the family stress theory by introducing the post crisis variables which they termed the "Double factor". The purpose of the inclusion of the double factors is to facilitate the understanding of why some families are able to adapt to crisis better than others.

McCubbin and Paterson (1982), explained the Double ABC-X factors as follows: the stress and change or Double A factor consists of: (a) initial stressor event with its inherent hardships that may have moved the family into its crisis state; (b) family life change events which occur irrespective of initial stress; and (c) stress which occurs as a consequence of family efforts to cope with hardships of the situation. These three types of stressors contribute to the "pile up" in family system. The family resource double B factor comprises two types of resources: (a) resources already available to the family

that help to reduce the impact of initial stress thereby minimizing the probability of the family entering into crisis and (b) coping resources of a personal, family and/or social nature which strengthens or develops in response to crisis situation. Coping resources include: (a) self-reliance and self-esteem (b) family integration (c) social support and (d) collective group supports that may include action.

The family's perception of Double C factor, according to McCubbin and Paterson (1982), depends upon whether the family's response is before or after a crisis. These are: (a) the family's perception of the stressor event or how the family views stressor related to the hardships, i.e. the "pile-up" events and (c) the meaning families attach to the family situation. The family's post-crisis situation develops the consideration of religious beliefs, a redefinition of the situation and endowing the situation with meaning. Lastly, the family's crisis adaptation of the Double X factor involves the process of stimulus regulation, environmental control and balancing to achieve a level of functioning which preserves family units and enhances the family system and member's growth and development.

Coping was highlighted as a means of managing hardships. Similarly, coping has been referred to as a strategy by which people take care of stress and stressful situations (Lazarus et al., 1974, Olsen et al., 1980), combined concepts related to stress theory and system model of family which would help to identify and apply family stress interventions, respectively. Murphy et al., (1966) studies attributed coping mechanisms to cognitive and behavioural abilities which McCubbin and Paterson (1981), integrated into the ABC-X model in order for family to achieve equilibrium. Thus, both coping and resources are significant in family adaptation process.

White (1974) described adaptation as acceptable compromise between living systems in interaction with their environment. This interactive process may occur naturally and not automatically and it can be purposeful and deliberate as submitted by (Calhoun and Acocella, 1978). McCubbin and Paterson family stress theory (1983), defined adaptation as "the degrees to which the family system alter internal functions (behavior, roles, rules, perception) and/or external reality to achieve a system (individual or family) that fits the environment". According to them there is a reciprocal relationship between the living system and the environment which invariably bring internal and external factors to equilibrium from resultant crisis. Resources which include psychological, social, interpersonal and material resources of individuals and family members play in concert to achieve adjustment and/or adoption among situations either short-term (adjustment) or long-term (adaptation) responses.

Since social norms in the Nigerian context still indicate, that the male works as the breadwinner for their family, the wife bears and rears the children and takes care of the

household, deviation from such norms may result in psychological economic and physical stress. (Amfani-Joe, 1986). This is because family resources, external or internal used in normal functioning or management process of the family system is disrupted and may cause disequilibrium. This phenomenon is illustrated by Hill's (1949) ABC-X model theory of family stress and crisis. Later, McCubbin and Paterson's (1982) Double ABC-X model theory and with lately, culture, belief/faith (religion) and several studies replete of concepts from family systems theory integrate to show applications to family stress and crisis intervention. Concepts fundamental to a strong couple family relationships such as commitment, integration and salience influence the family's cohesive accomplishment of goals and maintenance of a desired family structure.

SUMMARY

A review of literature related to family stress and crisis and coping behaviour theoretical/conceptual framework revealed several variables that influence decisions for housewives to work. These include income, education, self-esteem, children, occupation, etc.

Since social norms still indicate that the male works as breadwinner of the family while the wife bears the children and rears the children and takes care of the household activities, norms may result in psychological, economic and physical stresses. This is because family resources, external or internal, used in normal functioning of the family system is disrupted and may cause disequilibrium. This phenomenon is illustrated in Hills' (1949, 1948) ABC-X model of family stress and crisis. Later McCubbin and Paterson Double ABC-X model along with several other studies integrated several concepts for family and stress intervention. Certain concepts fundamental to a strong couple relationship such as commitment, integration and salience influence the family's structure. Consequently, working housewives have a need to determine coping behaviours (adjustments and adaptation) in day to day activities at home and at work. This is phenomenal to the rising challenges of the Nigerian working women as a result of global view and local societal changes. Hence, the need for studies in Nigeria to examine coping behaviour patterns of these working housewives in order to clarify its impact on the family. The Double ABC-X model provides an appropriate theoretical/conceptual framework as bases for such studies.

CONCLUSION

The ABC-X Double model provides an adequate and appropriate framework on which family stress and crisis studies can further be conducted as well as be improved or built upon in view of the Nigerian or even African context. Hopefully, such studies may

provide insights from which to determine the degree to which family resources and management programme in Nigeria will integrate coping behaviour patterns of Nigerians into various discipline areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. This paper is an expository one, therefore, further studies about stress, crisis and coping or management process techniques related to the ABC-X model is recommended in order to help Nigerian families deal with stress situations as a result of the gradual shift in family role changes vis-à-vis more educated women working outside.
2. The ABC-X model forms a basis upon which family living, sociologist, psychiatrists, religious bodies and other related subject areas can use as conceptual framework in research in the Nigerian context.
3. While the overview of the progression of the formulation of the Double ABC-X model of adjustment and adaptation make it an appropriate model for family stress, crisis and coping theoretical framework, ethnographical, cultural and religious differences in practice are factors that may vary the construction of this model in a significant way in the Nigerian or even African context. In-depth study involving data from observation, interview, ethnographic and anthropometric techniques about coping behaviours of educated working housewives using the ABC-X model to identify coping patterns and particular problems in coping for policy decisions in the Nigerian democratic setting is recommended.
4. The ABC-X model provides a working basis for studies in the discipline of family resources and management for research and practice in Nigeria learning institutions.

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