



Constructing a Harmonious Family: Family Relationships From Estrangement to Interaction

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Abstract

Harmony is an ideal state that human kind has pursued in the past several thousand years. Construction of a harmonious family is to realize harmonious relationship and coordination between family members and to realize mutual respect, trust and assistance among family members. For the time being, the kind of family that keeps promise, performs an obligation and shows care for each other among family members is still the mainstream and a large majority of families have strong coordination and adaptation capacity. However, it is still not enough in emotional expression, building of a happy atmosphere and tolerance and compromise in interpersonal interaction. Estrangement of interpersonal relations in a family becomes a major factor in influencing family harmony and gives rise to a series of family issues, such as, marriage issue, empty nest issue and family violence. Family is the cell of a society and construction of a harmonious family is of great significance to stability and healthy development of the society. This paper studies the issues frequently occurring in interpersonal relations in a family and proposes guidelines and suggestions for construction of a harmonious family.

Key words: Family relationship; Estrangement; Interaction; Harmonious

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INTRODUCTION

As a basic organization in the social organism, family is an important carrier in constructing a harmonious society. With constant change in the economic structure and social structure and increase of uncertainty in the risk society, economy and work pressure become recessive factors in worry of a family. The value concept, purport and interest, personal objective and diversification and variability of the living mode make the phenomenon of estrangement in a family relationship caused by personality independence and living pressure more and more popular. Issues in a family caused thereby will gradually influence harmony of a family. How a family enhances the cohesive force and social adaptability of family members through excavating internal resources and plays the positive functions of a family to respond to the pressure and challenges brought by the process of modernization becomes the risk of the rapid change and a new subject proposed by the competitive society. This paper discusses how family relationships transfer from estrangement to the interaction mode to promote the harmonious development of the society at the time of promoting family harmony.

1. EMPIRICAL SURVEY ON FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

In the interview and survey on family relationships, we choose a representative case study as the object of study from the multiple case studies. We make an analysis on the major issues existing in a family.

Ms. Yuan is 36 years old and lives in a village. She has an only child who is 12 years old. She throws in labor force in a city with her husband for more than ten years. After they earn some money in the city, they build a house in their native village which is used for their son to get married. After having lived in the village for a short period of time, they again come to the city to work part-

time. She has her parents in law who are over 60 years old left in the village who often chatter and complain about not staying at home by their son and their daughter in law. The negative emotion of the empty nest elderly often imposes great pressure upon the two young couples. The relationship between Ms. Yuan and her husband is often at a tense condition. Their son often has an estranged relationship with his father because of his close relationship with his mother. The contradiction between the couples becomes more and more serious because of the child. "After my husband makes a mistake, he often quibbles and says I do wrong to him, shows no respect to him and don't accept his views. Besides, when I explain to him that my view is better, and the result also verifies this, he always quarrels and confutes on me with excuse that I am also wrong. The year before last year, I got a bone fracture and had no way to work. Thus, the family depended only on him and he not only had pressure, but also complained. When I actively talked with him, he even gave a cold shoulder. I asked him for the reason, and he even didn't answer. Sometimes, he interrogated me by asking why our son listened to me and didn't listen to him. At present, the economic condition of the family is bad. When he is perturbed, he goes out to have a drink and when he is drunk, he abuses me after he returns. If I try to defend myself, what I have to face is a good licking. After he comes to awareness, he promises he won't life a hand in future. However, once he has a drink again, he still assaults. I am afraid of his beating as he is totally out of mind. And I have had enough of such life."

In the above case study, several issues of family relationships are reflected and family members have a lot of psychological problems as they, for a long time, are at a bad family relationship, which gives rise to further deterioration of the family relationships. If these family relationship issues are not resolved for a long time, it is inevitable and possible that they will cause the family to break up at any time.

2. MAJOR FAMILY RELATIONSHIP ISSUES EXISTING IN THE ABOVE CASE STUDY

2.1 The Issue of Spousal Relationship

In the above case study, the relationship between Ms. Yuan and her husband has been in conflict and contradiction. This is partly because their viewpoints are inconsistent due to the difference of their personality. In addition, the couples are lacking in communication skills, which makes their communication blocked for a long period of time. In the meantime, the asymmetrical condition of the economic relationship in the family causes the spousal relationship in the family to be in imbalance just like a scale. The economic dependence

of the wife fosters the power of the husband and makes the unequal condition of the spousal relationship that has lasted for a long time unable to be effectively resolved. Besides, the couple of Ms. Yuan also come into conflict in the issue of their child. The spousal relationship is further estranged due to the issue of the parent child relationship. In this family, continued multiple contradictions have no way to turn to a positive side, and, instead, gradually deviate from the harmonious track and give rise to rigid spousal relationship. The helplessness feeling of Ms. Yuan and her desperation attitude towards the spousal relationship makes the spousal relationship in the family develop towards a negative direction day by day.

2.2 The Issue of Family Violence

In the case study, Ms. Yuan fails to get recognition of her husband for long and often suffers from depression and pain in the spirit because of dispute between the couple. She even has to suffer from a good licking from her husband after her husband gets drunk. These belong to physical violence and spiritual violence in family violence. Family violence can be classified into physical violence, spiritual violence and sexual abuse. Physical violence means violent conduct on the body of family members, such as, hurt, torment and vandalization. Spiritual violence refers to the violent conduct on family members, such as, language humiliation and menace and emotional ignorance. Sexual abuse refers to violent conduct on family members, such as, criminal assault, sexual harassment and incest. Any kind of violent conduct may lead to spiritual hurt of a family member forever and persistent violence that lasts for long may cause the family member assaulted to lose confidence and hope and abandon the will to make any change. By contrast, the one who imposes the conduct of violence often extends their violent behavior and forms the inertance of conducting violence. In such a family, the persistent violence of the one who imposes violence may give rise to temporary and stable deformed balance under the constant tolerance of the one assaulted. However, both the physical and psychological health of the family members is non-benign.

2.3 The Issue of Empty Nest Elderly

The parents in law of Ms. Yuan belong to helpless empty nest elderly. This type of old people wishes to live together with their children. However, urged by life, their children have to migrate out for work and do business outside, as a result of which they have to leave their parents at home. Ms. Yuan and her husband belong to those who have to work outside for years in order to lead their life. However, her parents in law are not willing to leave at home and they are often worried about their children's leaving. This type of helpless old people often have such negative emotions of complaining, despair and isolation, which may often convey, in an explicit or

implicit way, some negative emotions and feelings to their children, such as, the sense of guilt and sense of worry caused because the children are unable to accompany with their parents. And the continuous convey of these negative emotions between generations will ultimately become an implicit negative factor for harmony of a family.

3. AN ANALYSIS OF THE REASONS FOR THE ISSUES OF FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

In the above case study, there are mainly the following three aspects of reasons for the issues of family relationships in the family of Ms. Yuan.

3.1 The Reason for the Issue of Spousal Relationship

Spousal relationship is a particular interpersonal relationship and means that the two parties of men and women live a common life in sexual life, social life and economic life by means of legal marriage procedures. In a family, the interest and emotion of all family members may be difficult to be coordinated since the member structure is complex and its connection with the original family is close. Independence of sex, intergeneration and economy and the consciousness of equality and democracy has unconsciously been integrated into the family. This causes its structure to often come into discrepancy and conflict with the family ethics of a traditional family. As a consequence, sex independence and economic independence appear in the family and the two parties both have their own independent career, work and way of getting along with others. It is inevitable that they both will present strong personality. As a result, the two parties of the couple are unable to give enough time and space to the other to deal with their personal affairs. Meanwhile, lack of trust and support as well as communication skills make the spousal relationship at a tense condition for a long time.

3.2 The Reason for the Issue of Family Violence

From the perspective of interpersonal relationship, the reason why Ms. Yuan suffers from family violence is that the family interpersonal relationship between Ms. Yuan and her husband is not treated in a good way and gives rise to evil consequence. Lack of economic position is also a major reason for emergence of family violence. Once a party is deficient of an economic position, he or she will become affiliate of the other and the one party who has the economic position will have absolute authority. This authority that has no restraint will become more and more swollen with ongoing of time. When this party is perplexed with money, he or she will give vent to the other party. Although Ms. Yuan has not directly acquired income for the family, she, likewise, has fulfilled her obligation of bringing up and supporting for the family in her life. Thus, she feels unfair and contradictions between the two

also give rise to family violence. In addition, the male chauvinism of the husband, together with flabbiness of the wife, is also an important reason for emergence of family violence. In the traditional family concept, the feudal concept of wisely submission and virtue is deeply rooted and the unshakable position of men breeds his arrogance. Flabbiness of women is reflected in deficiency of the consciousness of decision making, the consciousness of men being superior to women, the consciousness of being busy with housework all day long and unwillingness to take part in the society and the practice of accommodating themselves to men for the mistake of men. As time passes, this provides soil of multiplying for family violence. What's more, the grass-root society is deficient of prevention and control measures and quite a large part of people hold the view that family violence is a private matter within a family and others neither have the right to intervene nor have the ability to resolve. This is the so-called saying that even an upright official finds it hard to settle a family quarrel. As a consequence, the one who conducts family violence seldom gets sanction and growth of family violence incidents is fostered. Usually, the one who conducts family violence has low cultural and education level or bad quality. They have wrong understanding and bad life habits and they have the psychological disease and defect of character that they do not treat assaulting conscientiously.

3.3 The Reason for the Issue of Empty Nest Elderly

With deepening of the degree of social aging, the number of empty nest elderly becomes larger and the issue of empty nest has become a social issue that can't be neglected. The empty nest elderly refer to the elderly at an age of sixty years old and above who live alone for a long time or who live together only with the other one of a couple and also who live together with underage grandsons or granddaughters for a long time. Emergence of empty nest elderly has three reasons. Firstly, living and housing conditions are improved. A large number of elderly people like to live alone. Secondly, the family planning makes the family structure to tend to miniaturization. The number of family members is reduced and marriage of the children changes the original family structure. Thirdly, a lot of young people go out to work part time, do business and engage in other jobs and leave their empty nest elderly at home. Ms. Yuan lives in a rural village and it is difficult to depend on farmland to maintain the mean of livelihood of the whole family. Therefore, she has to go to cities to work part time to mitigate the economic pressure. However, the elderly have weak ability and fewer opportunities to participate in labor in the cities. Thus, they have no other choice but to leave at home to become empty nest elderly, which is urged by the reality. Under the influence of the traditional Chinese culture, quite a large part of parents have strong

psychological dependence on their children and hold a high expectation on their children's returning. Therefore, when their children leave the home as a result of several reasons, the psychological disorder symptom on the elderly who live alone is termed as family empty nest syndrome. All these are the major reasons for the issue of empty nest elderly.

4. MEASURES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR CONSTRUCTING A HARMONIOUS FAMILY RELATIONSHIP

4.1 Improvement of the Spousal Relationship Depends on Improvement of Personal Quality

A good spousal relationship should be based on equal love of the two parties, mutual understanding and mutual trust. What Ms. Yuan and her husband lack is exactly such a relationship. In order to establish such a good spousal relationship, the first thing to do is to enhance the personal quality of the two parties or, at least, a single party. Improvement of personal quality is reflected in cultural level and moral cultivation as well as overall improvement of physical quality. Usually, the party of a couple who wishes to make a change has more power of action. The family of Ms. Yuan can drive harmony of the family with civilization process of woman. Since woman possesses a particular position and performs a particular function in a family, quality of a family housewife has enormous effects on their parents, their spouse and their children. Therefore, to a certain extent, change of woman often has a direct influence on the life quality of three generations and the degree of harmony of the family and is of great importance to improvement of the spousal relationship.

4.2 Strengthening the Vigor of Publicity and Popularization of Law to Control Happening of Family Violence

In order to resolve the issue of family violence, it is required to strengthen publicity and education of a harmonious family relationship, improve the quality of all the citizens and build a good socialist family atmosphere. The power of the media and public opinions is powerful. Thus, we should not ignore the publicity effect of the media. On the contrary, we should resort to the power of public opinions to make the immoral get due condemn of the public opinions and advocate good marriage morality and family virtue to enable the concept of opposing family violence to be deeply rooted and reverse the wrong knowledge of a large number of people so as to make positive resistance on violence. At the same time, we should make publicity on laws and regulations about family violence to let more people come to aware and take advantage of legal means to protect their own rights and benefits. Besides, we ought to conduct education on women—the primary victim of family violence,

through multiple channels, to enable them to be really independent, self-esteem and self-improved and to come to realize and dare to protect their own rights and say “no” to the family violence. In this way, a harmonious family at a new era can be gradually constructed.

4.3 Constructing a New Type of Family Relationship to Enrich the Content of Life and Improve the Life of Empty Nest

As for the empty nest elderly, in order for them to break away from influences of the traditional Chinese culture in their mind and alleviate their psychological dependence on their children, it is necessary for them to build a new type of family relationship. A new type of family relationship is to change the center of gravity in the family relationship from a vertical relationship between the parents and the children to a horizontal spousal relationship, reduce appropriately the emotional dedication of parents to their children and reduce the parents' value of expectation on the returns of their children. Especially, when the children grow to an age to leave their family, the parents ought to make sufficient psychological preparations and develop new interest and hobbies in the life so as to gradually replace and reduce their dependence on their children. Therefore, the empty nest elderly ought to enrich new life content in due course and try to find out a new replacement role. For instance, they can cultivate their interest and hobbies to take part in a variety of social activities, such as, participating in a variety of community public benefit activity associations and participating in public benefit labors. They can improve their life of empty nest by means of constructing a new interpersonal relationship to adjust the original life mode.

CONCLUSION

The ancient philosopher Meng-tse ever said, “The foundation of the world is the country and the foundation of a country is the family.” His words deeply points out the close relationship between family and the society. Family and the society are closely connected. When each family is healthy and harmonious, the whole society will be necessarily healthy and harmonious. On the contrary, if family, the cell that constitutes the great system of the society, has any problem, then disharmony of the whole society will be highlighted. In brief, a harmonious marriage guarantees a harmonious family and a harmonious interpersonal relationship in a family guarantees a harmonious society. We ought to promote harmony of the interpersonal relationship in the society with harmony between family members, promote harmony of a group with harmony between neighbors and promote harmony between the society and the nature with harmony between family and the environment to enhance the life quality of the entire society.

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