

Comparison of Coping Strategies and Psychological Hardiness in Matriarchs and Married Mothers under the Auspices of Supportive Institutions

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND

Matriarchs are considered as high-risk populations in any society. Understanding the dimensions of psychological hardiness and coping strategies used by individuals can help to better manage mothers' behaviours. The current study aimed at comparing the coping strategies and psychological hardiness between matriarchs and married mothers.

METHODS

The current descriptive-comparative study was conducted on 208 married mothers and matriarchs under the auspices of supportive institutions in Sanandaj City, Iran, from 2017 to 2018. The mothers who participated in this study were selected through simple random sampling. Data was collected by the Billings & Moos coping response inventory and the Lang & Goulet psychological hardiness scale. Data was analysed with SPSS Version 25.

RESULTS

The results of the current study showed that matriarchs and married mothers had no difference in problem-oriented and emotion-oriented coping strategies ($p > 0.05$). There was a significant difference between psychological hardiness and its two components, control and commitment ($p < 0.05$).

CONCLUSIONS

In general, matriarchs have higher degrees of hardiness than ordinary mothers. This suggests that the occurred situation and retaining the responsibility of children increase the psychological hardiness in matriarchs. In addition, the role of being a mother is more important than the wifehood role or re-marriage.

KEY WORDS

Coping Strategies, Psychological Hardiness, Matriarchs

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BACKGROUND

Motherhood is a challenging role even for successful and educated women benefitting from a supportive system including husband and parents.⁽¹⁾ Motherhood, especially in single women, is associated with higher vulnerability to a variety of risks, ranging from economic problems to poor mental functioning.^(2,3) Matriarchs bear higher degrees of tensions in playing parenting roles compared to married women, and often experience stress and conflict between family and work.⁽⁴⁾ The matriarchs should play the role of both father and mother, in the absence of the father; upbringing, supporting, clothing, feeding, housing, etc., all should be provided by only the mother, without the assistance of father.⁽⁵⁾ Low-income mothers eagerly play their parenting role without receiving a larger social support for childrearing and spend their own physical and emotional health under such circumstances.⁽⁶⁾ Families headed by matriarchs are much poorer than ordinary families.⁽⁷⁻¹²⁾ Matriarchs and their children are among the vulnerable groups of the society.^(11,13,14) The matriarchy includes a wide range of experiences in not being accepted in the family and the society.⁽¹⁵⁾ Mothers spend a lot of energy, not only on their parenting roles, but also for the larger problems threatening their family lives.⁽¹⁶⁾ It refers to behaviours protecting people from mental damages in terms of experiencing social problems.⁽¹⁷⁾ Coping is defined as the cognitive and behavioural efforts made to master, tolerate, or reduce external and internal demands and conflicts among them. Such coping efforts serve two main functions: an appraisal of harm/loss, threat, or challenge stimulates coping efforts that change the person-environment relationship by altering the relationship itself (problem-focused coping) and/or by regulating emotional distress (Emotion-focused coping).⁽¹⁸⁾ The theory of coping traditionally focuses on the management of distress and problems.⁽¹⁹⁾ Psychological hardiness leads to a reasonable strategic use and the reduction of the risk of using inefficient strategies.⁽²⁰⁾ Psychological hardiness is an aspect of personality traits that acts as a source of resistance in the face of stressful life events.⁽²¹⁾ Personality hardiness refers to commitment, control, and challenge.^(21,22) In fact, feeling of control over life events is the tendency toward facing challenges and beliefs in the capability of recognizing personal abilities.⁽²³⁾ Accidents and stressful events of life are often inevitable and mentally perceived.⁽²⁴⁾ Stressful events increase pressure, but reduce its hardiness.⁽²⁵⁾ Some previous studies indicated that single mothers had a higher level of negative coping strategies than the married ones.⁽²⁶⁾ The higher economic strain of custodial mothers contributed to impaired role-coping strategies and loss of parental control, which ultimately interfered with parenting.⁽²⁷⁾ In women, hardiness may be more related to mental health.⁽²⁸⁾ Women with higher degrees of optimism and hardiness are more likely to use positive, spiritual, and planning coping strategies.^(29,30) Some studies showed that despite the low level of support, increased pressures of life, and changes in the lives, there is no difference between single mothers and married ones in coping with difficulties.⁽³¹⁾ Single mothers can cope with stressors similar to married ones.⁽³²⁾ There is no difference in psychological hardiness between single, divorced, and married mothers.⁽³³⁾ All healthcare and supportive groups should develop their

insights on the unique needs and problems of the poor families and the families headed by matriarchs as well as their weaknesses and strengths. Nursing studies are required in this field; in addition, the process developing this knowledge is important. In the current study, matriarchs and married mothers were compared in terms of coping strategies and psychological hardiness under similar economic-cultural situations.

METHODS

The current descriptive-comparative study was conducted on 208 matriarchs and married mothers under the auspices of the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee and the Welfare Organization in Sanandaj, from 2017 to 2018. Mothers were allocated into two groups of 104 subjects using simple random selection method. To collect the data, the researcher referred to the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee and Welfare Organization in Sanandaj after obtaining the ethical code from the Ethics Committee of Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences as well as the permission from the Vice-Chancellor of Education and Research of the Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery. After reviewing the introduction letter by the authorities and security officials of the organizations, the permission was issued by the Kurdistan Province offices of the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee and the Welfare Organization to be submitted to the districts 1 and 2 of the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee offices and the local office of Welfare Organization in order to provide access to Social Services Statistics under the supervision of social workers and a physical space was given to the researcher to complete the questionnaires via interviewing the participants. A demographic characteristics questionnaire, the Billings & Moos coping response inventory (CRI) as well as the Lang & Goulet psychological hardiness scale (LGHS) was employed to gather data of mothers. First, demographic characteristics of mothers were collected in two matched groups. Then, the Billings & Moos CRI, developed in 1984, consisting of 32 items was used. The CRI consists of five subsamples including problem solving, cognitive assessment, excitement, physicalization and social support, which are categorized in two categories of Problem-oriented coping and emotional-oriented coping.

Problem solving, cognitive assessment, and social support through counseling experts are in the realm of problem-oriented coping strategies, and emotion avoidance, somatization, and seeking social support from friends, family, and non-experts for confabulation constitute emotion-oriented coping strategies.^(34,35) According to Billings and Moos, the validity of CRI was 0.62.⁽³⁵⁾ In Iran, the content validity of CRI was 0.88.⁽³⁶⁾ In the study by Chavoshifar and Rasoulzadeh Tabatabai, the validity of CRI was 0.89.⁽³⁷⁾ In this study, an Interclass Correlation Coefficient test was used to determine the reliability of which was 0.94. Third, the Lang & Goulet psychological hardiness scale (LGHS), developed by Lang and Goulet was used. LGHS is a self-report scale with 45 items.⁽³⁸⁾ Roshan and Shakeri translated the questionnaire into Persian and based on the results of their study, reduced the items of the scale to 42 in three subscales of control (16 items), commitment (15 items), and challenging

(11 items). The validity of the LGHS was confirmed using the factor analysis, structural validity, convergent validity, and differential validity. The content validity of the scale was calculated through construct validity ($r=0.64$; $p=0.000$). The differential validity was $r=0.47$. Convergent validity in the subscale of control was $r=0.91$, commitment $r=0.86$, and challenging $r=0.70$.⁽³⁹⁾ In the current study, the interclass correlation coefficient was used to determine the reliability of the scale that was 0.92. The index was above 0.8, which indicated the desired degree of stability. Collected data were analyzed with SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics (Frequency, mean, and standard deviation) were used to express the data, and to explain the data and compare the mean of the two groups, in case of the normality of the data distribution independent t-test was employed and in case of non-normality, the non-parametric test- i e, the Mann-Whitney- was used. The level of significance was <0.05 .

RESULTS

The mean age of the matriarch and the ordinary mother groups was 41.11 ± 11.24 and 39.35 ± 10.30 years, respectively. In the group of married mothers, all the subjects (100.0%) lived with their spouses and in the matriarch group, majority of the subjects (53.8%) were divorced ones followed by widows (30.8%). All participating matriarchs and married mothers were Muslim. In addition, majority of matriarchs (54.8%) and married mothers (52.9%) had elementary education. Also, 97.1% of matriarchs and 86.5% of the married mothers had high school diploma or uncompleted high school education.

Based on the Mann-Whitney test, the mean scores of problem-oriented coping were similar in the two groups of mothers. The significance level was $p < 0.05$ and $p = 0.099$ in the problem-oriented coping, which indicated no significant difference between the matriarch and married mother groups in terms of the problem-oriented coping strategy (Table 1).

According to Levin's test of equality of variance, $p = 0.798$ for the emotion-focused coping, which indicated the equality of variance between the groups and based on independent t-test, there was no significant difference between the groups ($p = 0.891$); according to the mean difference of 0.183, there was no significant difference between the groups in terms of emotion-oriented coping strategies, which showed that matriarch and married mother groups had no difference in emotion-oriented coping strategy (Table 2).

Matriarchs and married mothers had significant difference in commitment components of the psychological hardiness. According to differences in the mean and total scores, matriarchs had more commitment to life compared to the married mothers. Matriarchs and married mothers had no significant difference in challenging subscale. According to significance level of the study ($p < 0.05$), and that of the control component ($p = 0.055$), no significant difference was observed between matriarchs and married mothers in psychological hardiness in terms of the challenging subscale (Table 3).

In the control component, based on Levin's test of equality of variance in the two groups, $p = 0.055$, the same variance was observed in the two groups and therefore, based on the results of independent t-test ($p = 0.027$), matriarchs had more control over their family lives compared to the married mothers. In the Psychological Hardiness, based on the results of independent t-test ($p = 0.006$), there was a significant difference between the two study groups. matriarchs had more Psychological Hardiness in compared to the married mothers (Table 4).

Group	Matriarch		Married Mother		p
	Mean Score	Total Score	Mean Score	Total Score	
Problem-oriented coping strategy	111.36	10155.00	97.64	11581.00	0.099

Table 1. Results of the Mann-Whitney Test for Problem-Oriented Coping Analysis in Matriarchs and Married Mothers Under the Auspices of the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee and the Welfare Organization in Sanandaj City

Test	Levi's Test		Independent t-Test	
	F	p	Mean Difference	p
Emotion-focused coping strategy	0.066	0.798	0.183	0.891

Table 2. The Results of Independent T-Test for Emotion-Focused Coping Analysis in Matriarchs and Married Mothers under the Auspices of the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee and the Welfare Organization in Sanandaj City

Subscale	Matriarch		Ordinary mother		p
	Mean Score	Total Score	Mean Score	Total Score	
Commitment	115.49	12010.50	93.51	9725.50	0.008
Challenging	112.65	11715.50	96.35	10020.50	0.050

Table 3. The Results of the Mann-Whitney Test to Compare Commitment and Challenging Components between Matriarchs and Married Mothers Under the Auspices of the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee and the Welfare Organization in Sanandaj City

Subscale	Levi's Test		Independent t-Test	
	F	p	Mean Difference	p
Control	3.739	0.55	2.586	0.027
Psychological Hardiness	4.344	0.038	5.365	0.006

Table 4. Results of Independent T-Test in the Control Component between Matriarchs and Married Mothers under the Auspices of the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee and the Welfare Organization in Sanandaj City

DISCUSSION

In the current study, the coping strategy was investigated in its two main dimensions as problem-oriented and emotion-oriented coping strategies. There was no significant difference between the matriarchs and married mothers in terms of both problem-oriented and emotion-oriented coping strategies that was in line with the findings of Weinraub & Wolf, Holloway & Machida, Propst et al., Williams, and Arditti & Maddenderdich. The conceptual understanding of divorced mothers of coping leads to the use of problem-oriented coping strategy.⁽⁴⁰⁾ Use of active coping strategies with a sense of control over childbearing practices alongside a potent parenting was significantly higher in divorced mothers.⁽⁴¹⁾ Despite lower levels of social support, increased pressure of life, and the changes in the life, single mothers were similar to married mothers in coping with difficulties.⁽³¹⁾ Single mothers are potent to cope with stressors similar to their married counterparts.⁽³²⁾ Children are the source of emotional support and the concept of the continuity of the goals of single mothers in terms of dealing with parental tasks.⁽⁴²⁾

Nevertheless, findings of the current study were inconsistent with those of Hilton & Desrochers and Sperlich & Maina. Single mothers showed a higher level of negative coping strategies than the married ones.⁽²⁶⁾ The higher economic strain of custodial mothers contributed to impaired role-coping strategies and loss of parental control, which ultimately interfered with parenting.⁽²⁷⁾

Psychological hardiness was investigated in three dimensions of control, commitment, and challenging, and the results showed a significant difference between matriarchs and married mothers in the control and commitment dimensions. Matriarchs had higher levels of control and commitment than married mothers.

Findings of the current study were in line with those of the studies by Hamid, Ashoori, Haidarabadi, and Smith reporting that women with higher hardiness could appraise stressful events more positively and manageably than the ones with lower hardiness.⁽⁴³⁾ When mothers learn psychological hardiness, they can assess stressful life events positively and more manageably.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Matriarchs, due to their feelings with their children, endure the pressures of life and are often responsible.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Parents with higher hardiness have higher sense of commitment and share in parental roles.⁽⁴⁶⁾

On the other hand, the findings of the current study were inconsistent with those of Schneewind & Pfeiffer as well as Bahmani et al. Single mothers and mothers in weak marriages have lower levels of commitment than their counterparts in more strong marriages.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Spirituality of mothers with disabled children makes them more likely to manage their lives, more active to deal with events, and more committed.⁽⁴⁸⁾ In the current study, there was no significant difference in religious beliefs between the two groups.

Matriarchs and married mothers did not differ in the challenging components of psychological hardiness. This finding was consistent with those of Gucciardi, Celasun & Stewart, Smith, and Luthar & Ciciolla. Motherhood is a challenging task even for successful and educated women benefitting from a supportive system including husband and parents.⁽¹⁾ Single mothers face more challenges than the ordinary ones.⁽⁴⁹⁾ When parents face parental challenges, hardiness may be a stress reliever.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Matriarchs faced a greater challenge in life, but they were similar to married mothers in challenging trait, which could be due to a higher psychological hardiness in matriarchs.

In the current study, the total psychological hardiness was compared and evaluated in matriarchs and married mothers. In psychological hardiness, matriarchs and married mothers showed differences. Matriarchs had more hardiness than married mothers. The findings of the current study were in line with those of Robitschek & Kashubeck, DelGrande, Ben-Zur, Duvdevany & Lury, Davoudimoghaddam et al., and Tomassetti-Long. For women, hardiness appeared to mediate partially the relation of family functioning to well-being.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Mothers in the non-depressed group had higher hardiness than their depressed counterparts.⁽⁵¹⁾

Psychological hardiness and social support are strongly dependent on the mental health of mothers.⁽⁵²⁾ Hardiness training as an effective factor in stress management can improve the personal and social compatibility in matriarchs.⁽⁵³⁾ Psychological hardiness has a positive effect on parental stress.⁽⁵⁴⁾ The results of the current study were in agreement with those of Smith Cohen & Dekel, Schmied &

Lawler, Subramanian & Nithyanandan, Sarani et al. Higher hardiness is associated with positive parental practices and low hardiness with negative parenting practices.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Hardiness in women may be more related to mental health.⁽²⁸⁾ Women with optimism and higher hardiness are more likely to use positive, spiritual, and planning coping strategies.^(29,30) The findings of the current study were inconsistent with those of Schmied & Lawler, Gill & Harris, and Segal-Engelchin. People receiving more social support express higher hardiness.⁽⁵⁵⁾ Hardiness is significantly correlated with age, level of education, and marital status. Older married people with higher levels of education have higher hardiness.⁽²⁸⁾ There is no difference in psychological hardiness between single, divorced, and married mothers.⁽³³⁾

In the current study, the hardiness of matriarchs was higher than that of married mothers, which can be due to the lack of independence and dependence of married mothers on their spouses or fear of divorce and stigma of the community forcing them to continue their lives with such emotional distance and the challenging relationship with their spouses. The most important limitation of the current study was the homogeneity of the study subjects in terms of race and religion, which limited the generalization of the results. In addition, the instruments were self-reporting.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the current study showed that matriarchs and married mothers had no significant differences in terms of problem-oriented and emotion-focused coping strategies. In total, the matriarchs had higher hardiness than married mothers, which indicated that accepting the childbearing responsibilities intensified hardiness in matriarchs. In addition, the current study results showed that the motherhood role was more important than the womanhood role or re-marriage. According to the results of the current study, future studies are suggested on populations of diverse cultural and social backgrounds.

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