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## Application of the Rule Concept of the Minuchin Structural Approach among Family Counseling Practitioners in Malaysia

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### Abstract

The Minuchin Structural Approach is an approach that focuses on family structures within the family system and subsystem. The purpose of this study is to explore the applications of the concept of rules in the Minuchin structural approach used by family counseling practitioners in the family counseling process in Malaysia. This study uses qualitative approaches and case study designs. This study involves 10 participants selected by sampling based on the criteria of conducting structural family counseling in their study. The study consisted of family counseling practitioners working at Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat, Lembaga Penduduk dan Pembangunan Keluarga Negara and Pusat Kaunseling Majlis Agama Islam Negeri Sembilan. Data analysis was thematic with N Vivo 12. The findings show that family counseling practitioners use the rule concept of the Minuchin family counseling approach in family counseling sessions. The findings of the study explain the application of the concept of rules in the family and how counseling practitioners use the concept to help families experiencing dysfunction in the family.

**Keywords:** Role, Regulation, Subsystem, Hierarchy, Border, Structure

### Introduction

Salvador Minuchin introduced this structural approach in (1974) by publishing the book Families and Family Therapy. Minuchin has developed this theory by forming his own family therapy in which he has incorporated not only unique terminology but also describes the key keys to the family. In ensuring that a family functions well, this theory assumes that it depends on the structure and adaptation in the family to maintain the stability of a family. In this approach as well, the concept of rules has been introduced which is also the core for the well-being of a family.

Minuchin (1974) says that several sets of rules are formed in the family to regulate the interaction of members in the family. These rules are based on agreements, setting boundaries and setting hierarchies. Rules are the laws or procedures of how each family member should behave in their family (Minuchin, 1974). Rules are the first thing that family members need to follow regardless of changes that may occur within or outside the family environment. Rules in the family can be either explicit or implicit. Well-functioning families

have more explicit rules than implicit rules. In setting a rule in the family all family members have to agree to the rule (Minuchin & Nichols, 1993). Minuchin uses this concept of rules to explain how members in the family behave and the effects if family members do not have clear rules in the family. This is because the existing subsystems in the family have their own roles and rules. The relationships between these subsystems are governed by spoken and unspoken rules (Minuchin et al., 1998).

According to Nicholas (2009) rules are sets of standards, laws, or traditions that tell how humans are to live and relate to each other and also patterns have long-term and profound effects. In the family also has its own set of rules such as the pronunciation of words such as "should" or "should not" be the main message that governs interaction within the family. Parents often set rules for the children in the family to follow because they are worried that the children will become uncontrollable if left without rules. Parents also typically build rules aimed at controlling tense situations. Minuchin (1974) says that the concept of this rule can be seen more clearly through boundaries in the family. Within the concept of boundaries, Minuchin (1974) says that boundaries are rules that determine "who participates and how much".

Issues involving the dysfunction of rules in the family also trigger children's social problems, marital relationships and parental relationships with children and are the main issues most often raised by families in the family counseling process (Norhayati, 2012; Mazita, 2018). Based on past studies by researchers using Minuchin's structural approach it clearly illustrates that the issue of unhealthy or dysfunctional family rules contributes to problems in the family. Therefore, the concept of role in the Minuchin Structural approach meets the needs of the process of improvement and restoration of the functioning of the family structure caused by various family issues in Malaysia. Therefore, this study aims to explore the use of the concept of Minuchin Structural approach rules in the family counseling process by counselors in Malaysia in helping the process of analysis of family problems to be more accurate and clear. Next help the family to gain mental literacy.

### **Methodologi**

This qualitative approach study uses a case study design to explore the application of rule concepts in Minuchin's structural approach among family counseling practitioners in implementing family counseling. In this study, research data were collected using in-depth face-to-face interviews, observation and document analysis. Researchers used interview data as the main data source. The interview data is transcribed into verbatim writing each time after the interview is completed to allow researchers to identify questions that are still unanswered by study participants and will be re-interviewed during the second round of interview sessions and researchers can know the level of data saturation. In-depth interviews were conducted guided by a semi-structured question protocol prepared by the researcher based on the researcher's reading from literature reviews such as journals and book publications. To ensure the validity of the study data, the interview question method was validated by three experts in the field of family counseling and qualitative experts.

The study participants in this study consisted of 10 cancellors registered with the Malaysian Board of Counselors. The three study participants were counselors at the Negeri Sembilan Islamic Religious Council Counseling Center, three study participants from the Social

Welfare Department, three counselors from the Population and Family Development Board and one counselor from the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. Study participants who were purposefully selected according to set criteria that is to have five years of working experience in handling family counseling (family cases), conduct family counseling sessions, have training at least at the Bachelor's Degree level in counseling, registered with the Counseling Board ( have a certificate of practice) and volunteer. The criterion of 50 counseling sessions refers to a total meeting time of 100 hours per year where if the counselor has served for three years, this means the practitioner has conducted the family counseling process for 600 hours. Counselors who have undergone a 600 -hour counseling process can be categorized as experienced counselors (Khodayarifard et al., 2007; Norhayati, 2012). Therefore in this study the selected counselors were known as family counseling practitioners.

The data analysis process in this study is based on thematic analysis. To ensure the validity and reliability of the study data, the transcribed data in verbatim form was sent back to all study subjects, reviewed by fellow researchers and expert evaluation in the qualitative and field of study. The formation of themes and sub -themes is based on library reading and reading transcripts repeatedly from line to line. Researchers have extracted themes through keywords generated from the data and extracted themes through sentence descriptions of specific keywords. The researchers used NVivo 12 software as a tool to manage the transcribed data. To ensure that the resulting themes are accurate, the researcher has read repeatedly to give meaning to the sentences in verbatim.

### Findings

Rules are guidelines set by the group that explain acceptable behavior and unacceptable behavior and the consequences if members fail to comply with those guidelines. In the family system, this concept of rules helps stabilize subsystems in the family and sets relevant guidelines for how each member behaves inside and outside the family system. The absence of this concept of rules in the family can cause family members to be free to do things that can have a negative impact on the family. Therefore the concept of this rule is an important concept and should exist in every family.

The importance of this rule concept can be seen from the findings of interviews with study participants. According to the experience of P8, the absence of rules in a family causes problems in the family. According to P8, when a family does not have a clear order, problems will be faced not only by the children in the family but will also affect the parents. P8 says when parents themselves do not have rules in their own lives, how do they want to make rules in their family. Children will not be able to live within the rules in a family like this. PKK8 states that the concept of rules, roles, boundaries, limitations are mandatory in a family.

*The rules in the family are not clear so the child will cause problems, not only cause problems for the child himself, but the parents themselves will have problems if they do not know their own role, if the rules are not in themselves, how can he do rules in the family. because he himself has no rules in his life, how can children want to live in rules. so that's why I see the meaning of this thing is mandatory in the family that is rules, roles, boundaries, limitations. This concept really needs to exist.*

Indeep interview /P8

P7 says that firmness in carrying out family rules is necessary to ensure that family members do not look down on the rules, according to P7, a father must be firm in making decisions and also in enforcing the rules in his family. This is because if the father fails to be firm in his decision and also does not care about the rules that exist in the family can result in the failure of members to follow the rules in the family. P7 gave an example of the no -return rule in the family. P7 says that if the father is a strict person, he will punish the child for violating the rules, but if no action is taken against the child who violates the rules, the child will not follow the rules. PKK7 says that a child will abide by the rules that have been set if his father plays his role.

*If a father fails to act decisively in deciding what all the rules we enforce in the family will not be. For example, he gave the rule not to come back late at night. That means go back before 10 pm last night when the child returns at 10.05 pm if the father is firm he will impose punishment or punishment on the child, but if it is a bit loose there may be a first warning, maybe a second warning or the other powerless does not take any action, So, the child can break or follow this rule by seeing how the father does not respond to the violation of the rule.*

Indeep interview /P7

This finding is similar to the findings of the P3 document analysis, P3 in the counselor's reflection said that rules and punishments are two important and interrelated aspects in ensuring the functioning of the family. According to PKK3, the rules in the family must be strictly practiced and any violation must be punished to ensure that each family member follows the rules made by the family.

*Rules and punishments are among the key indicators of a family's functional state.*

Indeep interview /P3

Meanwhile, P8 said that rules in the family should be practiced at an early stage. P8 says when the rules are not practiced from the beginning, that is, since the children are small then it is difficult to ensure that they follow the rules when they have grown up. P8 said that one of the examples of rules in the family that is not practiced between children and parents is when children return from school, children have to be kind to their parents by shaking hands and hugging their parents. P8 said the rule was important because of the loving touch between parents and children to ensure long-lasting family warmth. Although the action seems small but has a big impact because it can affect the relationship between parents and children.

*The relationship is normal, but since we were little, there were no rules in life, for example, back to school, greet mom, kiss mom, hug dad, kiss dad. Girls like that also go wherever the rules are, the rules we touch with the children are important. The relationship was like normal, talking was normal, but in terms of touch, in terms of the rules, I wanted to go anywhere, I didn't tell my mother, I wanted to go, I just went like that, until my mother was looking for me but the child was gone, that's why I said the rules That's important, the family structure, you have to know his role, you have to know his role.*

Indeep interview /P8

The concept of rules in the family is also used by PKK5 during family counseling sessions. According to PKK5, he will explain the concept of rules that must be in place in a



family to help family members identify behaviors that they can do and behaviors that they cannot do in their family. PKK5 also said that in the concept of this rule, it helps parents to educate their children. PKK5 said he gave knowledge and understanding to parents about the rules and roles in the family. PKK 5 also said that the role of the father as the head of the family does not mean that the father can be rude to these children because such an attitude can cause the children to be afraid of them.

*So I explained to him about the rules that should be there, how to educate children. So that later he will understand his rules, rules and regulations, rules and roles and why he is separated like this, he is rude to the child, the child is afraid, the child does not want to talk about fear, if he comes back the child is afraid.*

Indeep interview /P5

Observations conducted on family counseling sessions by P5 also found that P5 has used the concept of rules in the family to facilitate clients to understand the causes of conflict in the family and how they can solve problems in the family. P5 is seen several times using the concept of rules by emphasizing that rules in the family are to assist members in their interactions. P5 uses this concept in family counseling sessions involving overly strict rules due to the way fathers use military style in educating children. P5 helps fathers to gain mental literacy, that the military style practiced on children at home is inappropriate. This is because fathers need to be aware that children are not soldiers who are indeed trained in extreme conditions but rather children who grow up under the protection of mothers and fathers. P5 also made fathers aware that military rules are not suitable to be applied at home because each family has its own rules that are suitable for family members as ordinary people not military officers.

*These concepts are used to give clients an understanding of their roles and the rules that should be in place in the family. Study participants said the concept of father education based on the military concept is not suitable to be practiced with family members because non -military family members need to be punished severely only because of small things. Study participants said the rules in the military are indeed good but not suitable for use while in a family setting, as families need to have their own rules that make them unique.*

Observation /P5

Interview findings from P6 also say that each family has its own unique and distinctive rules. Those rules are not the same as other family rules. P6 said that among the examples of rules in a family is that children must be at home before six o'clock in the afternoon and during meals children are not allowed to use their smartphones. According to P6, more family members will set rules in their families to determine what can or cannot be done in the family. However, parents especially in the village areas usually have their rules to the children that the children should be at home before maghrib time.

*Every family has its rules, right, in the family itself. The children must be at home before six o'clock, if you go out, you must be at home before six o'clock, the rule is that the children must follow in the family or at the dining table, eating cannot play the phone, both set what we can do what we can't do. If the parents are in this*

*village, he doesn't talk but he instructs. Children who want to go out can go out, but return before maghrib, before the call to prayer.*

Indeep interview /P6

The findings of the interview from P6 also found that parents, especially Muslims, will set rules for their daughters to cover their aurat before leaving the house. Among the other rules in the family is not to watch television more than 10 pm, turn off the television at dusk, children can not enter the parents' room at will must ask permission before entering the parents' room.

*Can the woman who wants to go out cover her aurat well because you are under the responsibility of the father, we can't watch TV until late at night, 10 o'clock we have to close the TV, our rules and the children have to follow, do it because what has been set, time maghrib must close tv, must congregare. Again, the rules for children to enter the parents' room, children cannot enter the parents' room at will, they must follow the conditions and rules, for example, they have to knock on the door first to ask for permission first. Regarding the rules to enter, you have to knock first, if the parents are not in the room, they cannot enter.*

Indeep interview /P6

Apart from making rules, its implementation must also be complied with and not just making rules alone. P7 says that a father needs to be firm in making decisions and also in enforcing rules in his family. This is because if the father fails to be firm in his decision and also does not care about the rules that exist in the family can result in the failure of members to follow the rules in the family. P7 gave an example of the no -return rule in the family. P7 says that if the father is a strict person, he will punish the child for violating the rules, but if no action is taken against the child who violates the rules, the child will not follow the rules. P7 says that a child will abide by the rules that have been set if his father plays his role.

*If a father fails to be firm in making decisions, all the rules that we enforce in the family will not be. For example, he gave the rule not to come back late at night, you have to come back before 10 pm last night, when the child returns at 10.05 minutes, if the father is strict, he will impose punishment or the punishment will happen there as well, but if it is a bit loose, there may be a first warning, maybe a second warning or the other is not in power it doesn't matter, there is no action, the child can break or follow this rule by seeing how the father plays a role. Rules or any matter that binds the family member means there are rules.*

Indeep interview /P3

P8 said he used the concept of rules to find out the pattern of education accepted in the family. P8 also says that through the concept of rules, the causes of children's behavior can be identified.

*I want to know what kind of upbringing he has, the pattern of his family rules, and we want to know the reason why this boy is like this... I do use family rules, because in terms of family rules*

Indeep interview /P8

P8 sees the concept of rules should also be a practice in a family. Her experience of rules can help families manage the behavior of all family members in a positive direction and avoid family members behaving negatively. He added that there are rules in the family, especially in the aspect of behavior related to religion, that is, there are behaviors that are prohibited in terms of religious demands. According to P8, rules are a guide in a family to ensure that the family functions well. This is because the family can be shattered when there are no rules in the family because members in the family will act as they please regardless of any consequences that will be received. P8 said that in matters related to religion, parents need to educate their children to pray from an early age. This is because children will find it difficult to follow any rules made when they are adults.

*Apart from the role, the rules are there, the rules must be in the family otherwise the family will be undirected, we say because this man must have rules if there are no rules he will do as he pleases, in our religion for example, in our religion, there are rules, there are things that can be made there are things that cannot be made. Because what are the rules that we apply since he was little, isn't it that when the child grows up, we don't pray, we just want rotan*

Indeep interview /P8

P8 also says that any rules made must be complied with by all parties, including fathers and mothers. The rules made are to be obeyed by all family members, namely children as well as parents. If the rules only apply to the child while the parents do not have to follow the rules will cause the children to be dissatisfied and can cause them to rebel by choosing to just ignore the rules. P8 gave an example that the family rule is not to watch television during maghrib prayer time, mothers and fathers also can not watch television at that time despite having reasons such as illness and so on.

*The same goes for our roles and responsibilities. Rules with ourselves, if we have set rules we have to follow and children have to follow. For example, we say like a rule in the family, if at dusk you can't watch television, you can't be on television, does that rule apply to children only? He applies to the whole family including us, the wife, the son, the daughter and all the other children. We don't want to give an exception to my mother because my mother cannot pray because she is sick or my sister is sick. No, because it's still a rule. Because the child will later question our actions. if we make a rule, but there is no support and implementation on the rule, then no function of the rule is created.*

Indeep interview /P8

## Discussion

In this study, family counseling practitioners used the concept of rules as one of the important aspects in the family. Rules in the family set out what family members can and cannot do. these rules are usually set by parents to ensure that children do not act as they please. Among the other rules in the family is not to watch television more than 10 pm, turn off the television at dusk, children can not enter the parents 'room at will must ask permission before entering the parents' room. A father needs to be firm in making decisions and also in enforcing rules in his family. This is because if the father fails to be firm in his decision and also does not care about the rules that exist in the family can result in the failure of members to follow the rules in the family. The findings of this study differ from the study by Zainudin and Norazmah (2011) who found that when parents are said to be strict in giving punishment to their children they



are worried the children will act negatively if parental discipline is strict. This is because more autocratic parents will make the souls of teenagers rebellious. Zainal and Sharani's (2004) study also explains the effect of autocratic control methods will result in a combination of rebellion and dependence.

The study also found that the concept of this rule is closely related to the behavior of children inside and outside the family. families with appropriate rules can help determine children's behavior however if the rules imposed by parents are too severe, it can have an impact on children's self-esteem thus causing children to become reticent or antisocial. This study supports the findings of a study conducted by Crane et al (2020) who examined the relationship between rules and hidden family processes with adolescent prosocial and antisocial communication behaviors. The findings of Crane et al (2020) show positive relationships in the family, have a direct correlation with rules in the family. Meanwhile, the negative relationship in antisocial communication for girls and boys is due to rules that are too strict and extreme so as to cause children to be antisocial.

### **Significance of the Study**

The importance of this study is to provide an understanding and knowledge of the rules that must exist in a family to achieve a prosperous and harmonious family. The researcher also hopes that this study can contribute to a healthy family structure in a family in Malaysia. This is because a healthy family structure can give birth to a prosperous society and country through the process of family counseling. This can help reduce the collapse of family institutions that lead to divorce and social problems involving adolescents.

### **Research Suggestions**

In order to improve the quality of family counseling services in Malaysia, training should be given to family counseling practitioners to get current training and cruises, although there are efforts by departments such as the Social Welfare Department, but the efforts are not yet comprehensive. According to the family counseling practitioners who were interviewed, they also said that there is a need to hold workshops, seminars or courses that can provide knowledge to counselors in Malaysia.

### **Conclusion**

Overall this study discusses the application of the concept of rules in the structural approach of the Minuchin family. The study of the application of the Minuchin structural concepts approach as a whole in Malaysia is still far away compared to other countries. Therefore, the results of this study can increase the practitioners' understanding of how the family counseling process using the Minuchin Structural approach is implemented in Malaysia. Apart from that, this study can add a 'body of knowledge' in counseling in this country. This study can stimulate or enhance the development of the role of family counseling in creating a prosperous society.

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