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VIOLENCE
PREVENTION
& RESPONSE
TECHNICAL
UNIT



Feminist-Grounded Family Functioning

Incorporating Gender and Power
Dynamics into a Measure of Family
Functioning among Men and Women in
the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo



Airbel Impact Lab
Research & Innovation at the IRC

Conceptualizing Feminist-Grounded Family Functioning in North Kivu, DRC



Family functioning pertains to how family members communicate, relate and maintain relationships, and how they make decisions and solve problems (Taliep et al. 2014).

Conceptualizing high family functioning in eastern DRC:

- Improved feelings of communication
- Empathy and affection for others
- Able to solve problems without the use of violence
- Shared value of different members
- Shared responsibilities
- Power sharing

How we developed the Feminist-Grounded Family Functioning Scale

- Literature review
- Definitional focus groups
- Free listing
- Cognitive interviewing
- Adaptation of existing measures
- Psychometric testing and latent class analysis

Generating items for gender and power dynamics

Free-listing:

- Everyone participates in decision-making
- Everyone can voice their opinion
- No one has power over someone else



Definitional focus group:

“Add something about not hiding resources from others, transparency in use of resources. Add something about not having jealousy between members of the family.”

“Partners make decisions together about the management of resources.”



New items:

Household tasks are shared equally between partners.

The female partner in your relationship has equal say in important questions.



Exploring & testing a feminist-grounded scale

The scale was adapted for this study through translation, content validation, and psychometric testing to achieve the final 26-item index.



***a priori* domains of family functioning**

Family cohesion
Affective responsiveness
Communication
Problem-solving
Boundaries
Roles

Gender and power dynamics in the
home

Chronbach's alpha of 26-item index: 0.86

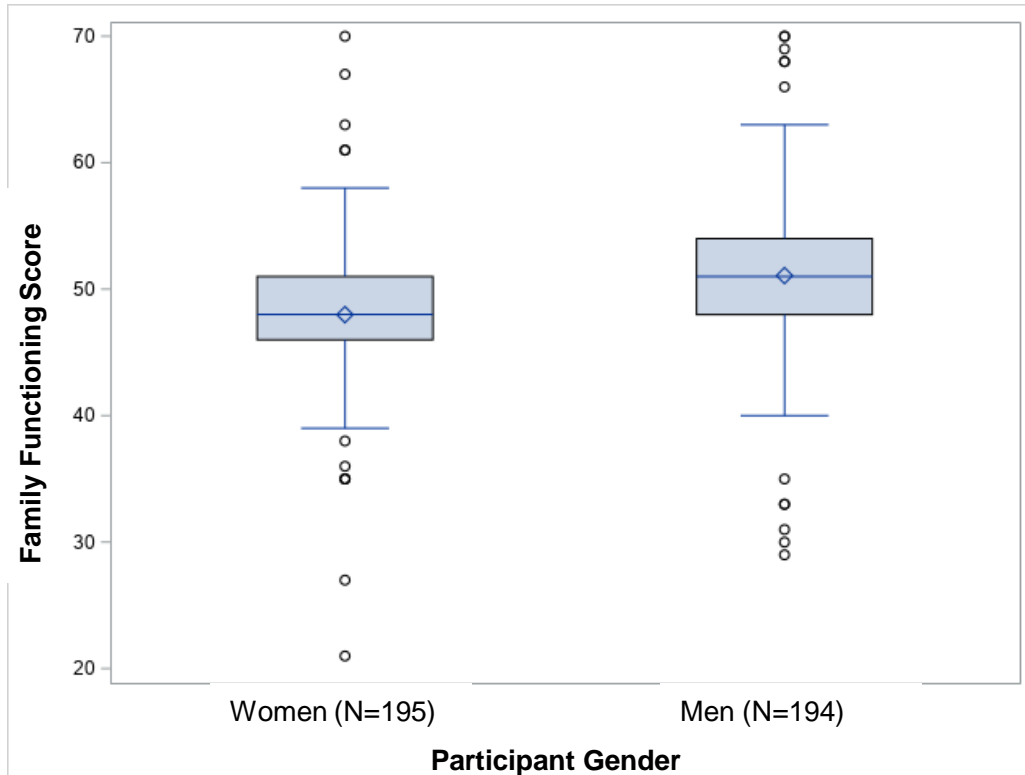
One-factor scale

Example items:

- Girls have the same chances as boys.
- The female partner in your relationship has equal say in important questions.
- We consult the children when we make important family decisions.
- We express feelings of love and affection towards each other.

Higher family functioning reported by men than by women

Feminist-Grounded Family Functioning Score by Gender



Cross-sectional data from baseline:
394 participants (196 men, 198
women)

Possible range: 0-78
Observed range: 21-70

Family functioning:
• Men: 51.08 (SD=6.57)
• Women 47.99 (SD=5.55)

Family functioning increases with positive behaviors, decreases with negative attitudes, conflict & displacement

Covariates		Association for Women β (SE)		Association for Men β (SE)
Parent displacement	↓	-0.78** (0.26)	↓	-1.08* (0.43)
Parent conflict experiences	↓	-0.71** (0.25)	↓	0.10 (0.31)
Acceptance of harsh discipline	↓	-0.20** (0.07)	↓	-0.24* (0.94)
Gender inequitable attitudes	↓	-0.15 (0.10)	↓	-0.22** (0.08)
Power sharing	↑	0.26*** (0.06)	↑	0.23*** (0.06)
Positive parenting	↑	0.51*** (0.12)	↑	0.54*** (0.14)

In multivariate model, family functioning increases with positive behaviors, decreases with displacement

Covariates		Association for Women β (SE)		Association for Men β (SE)
Parent displacement	↓	-0.65* (0.25)	↓	-0.45 (0.43)
Parent conflict experiences	↓	-0.29 (0.24)	↑	0.52 (0.31)
Acceptance of harsh discipline	↓	-0.12 (0.08)	↑	0.09 (0.13)
Gender inequitable attitudes	↑	0.08 (0.11)	↓	-0.09 (0.11)
Power sharing	↑	0.24*** (0.06)	↑	0.16* (0.06)
Positive parenting	↑	0.32** (0.12)	↑	0.41* (0.16)

In model exploring violence, co-occurring violence increases with negative attitudes, decreases with family functioning

Covariates		Association for Women aOR (CI)		Association for Men aOR (CI), p-value
Family functioning	↓	0.88*** (0.82, 0.95)	↓	0.97** (0.95, 0.99)
Acceptance of harsh discipline	↑	1.11** (1.04, 1.18)	↑	1.08* (1.00, 1.17)
Gender inequitable attitudes	↑	1.18*** (1.10, 1.27)	↑	1.11*** (1.09, 1.12)
Power sharing	↓	0.96** (0.94, 0.99)	↑	1.03 (0.99, 1.08)
Positive parenting	↓	0.68*** (0.60, 0.78)	↑	1.00 (0.95, 1.04)

Source: Falb et al. (2022). Preventing co-occurring intimate partner violence and child abuse in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo: the role of family functioning and programmatic reflections. Journal of interpersonal violence, 08862605221080152.

Key Take-Aways

- Measures to assess family functioning must consider **gender** and **power hierarchies** within the family
- Conflict and displacement negatively impact family functioning
- Hypothesized pathway:



- A focus on family functioning may be a promising approach to preventing violence in the home

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Supplementary slides

Family Functioning in the DRC (from free-listing)

When a family has high functioning, they no longer experience:

- Arguments and fighting between different family members
- Isolation of family members
- Discrimination or shame from others (within their family)
- Neglect

They do have:

- Improved feelings of communication
 - No fighting
- Empathy and affection for others
 - No shame
 - No isolation
- Able to solve problems without the use of violence
 - No arguments
- Shared value of different members
 - No discrimination
 - No neglect
 - No isolation
- Shared responsibilities
- Power sharing

Percent and Frequency of Agreement with Adapted 26-item Feminist-Grouped Family Functioning Score

Items as Reported among Women and Men

		Women (N=198)		Men (N=196)	
		n	%	n	%
3	We express feelings of love and affection towards each other.	182	91.92	177	90.31
4	We help and support each other.	177	89.40	186	94.90
5	When you ask a family member to do something, you don't trust that they will follow through with it.	183	92.43	188	95.92
11	Older children are responsible for the care of their younger siblings.	177	89.39	175	89.29
13	We are able to make decisions about how to solve a problem.	188	94.95	185	94.38
14	It is easy for us to talk to each other about things that matter.	185	93.44	185	94.39
15	We express our fears and concerns.	176	88.89	174	88.78
16	We make sacrifices if it benefits the family.	184	92.93	178	90.82
17	We all have chores to do in the house.	172	86.87	156	79.59
18	We have clear rules in our house about what we may or may not do.	183	92.43	158	80.61
19	When we make a decision about a problem, we act on it accordingly together.	181	91.41	172	87.76
21	Parents provide comfort if children are sad.	184	92.93	170	86.73
27	We console each other in difficulties.	182	91.92	183	93.36
26	When we speak to each other, everyone usually understands what is said.	132	66.67	148	75.51
25	When we have dealt with a problem, we usually discuss if it worked or not.	178	89.9	183	93.36
28	Supporting each other emotionally is encouraged	164	82.83	178	90.81
29	We discuss who is to do household chores.	165	84.18	165	84.19
30	We have rules about not hitting people/fighting each other.	183	92.42	160	81.63
31	We are able to talk to each other about things that make us unhappy.	164	82.83	132	67.34
33	We consult the children when we make important family decisions.	139	70.2	146	74.49
34	Children are comfortable expressing their point of view.	163	82.74	159	81.12
35	Household tasks are shared equally between partners.	102	51.52	146	74.49
36	Girls have the same chances as boys.	125	63.14	152	77.95
37	The female partner in your relationship has equal say in important questions.	103	52.02	163	83.16
38	The male partner in your relationship cares about the female partner's feelings.	139	70.2	163	83.59
39	The female partner in your relationship is able to express her opinion when she disagrees with what the male partner says.	86	43.44	126	64.28

Psychometric properties of the scale

Suitability and adequacy of 38 items for factor analysis:

- Bartlett's test of sphericity: $p < 0.001$
- Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test: 0.83 overall; 0.70 for women, 0.75 for men
- Principal component analysis yielded 12 components with Eigenvalues > 1.00
- 12 items with both low factor loadings (< 0.30) and high uniqueness (> 0.75) were dropped from the index

One-factor model with 26 items:

- Scree plots and parallel analysis suggested a one- or two-factor solution
- Contextual discussions posited family functioning as one joint concept
- Polychoric correlation and principal axis factoring
- Bartlett's test of sphericity: $p < 0.001$
- KMO test: 0.87 overall; 0.77 for women, 0.83 for men

Measures of dimensionality demonstrated better fit than the a priori scale:

- Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA): 0.07
- Tucker Lewis Index (TLI): 0.87
- Comparative Fit Index (CFI): 0.88
- Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR): 0.07