

FAMILY STRENGTHS, COMMITMENT AND
RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The family unit has served traditionally as the basis for individual as well as societal stability. Many persons have suggested that the individual and society can be no stronger than the family (Grams, 1967). The fact has been pointed out that "societies with strong family systems tended to recuperate rapidly from conditions of adversity whereas the opposite types recovered only with great difficulty" (Zimmerman, 1972, p. 325). Therefore, it is important to have strong healthy families, not only for the benefit of the individual members within the family unit, but also for society as a whole.

As family life proceeds through the transition from its rural configuration to one of urbanization in an age of technology, the question of its future and success is asked regularly. Rising divorce rates and changing life-styles indicate the problematic areas; but one must not become engrossed just with the area of problems. Most of the research in marriage and the family has been focused on the pathology of the family. Too little is known about the psychological and social factors which contribute to family strengths. Research studies designed to conduct a comprehensive examination of various aspects of family strengths have been limited. But, there is evidence that most individuals consider a strong, satisfying family life among their most important aspirations (Otto, 1962, 1972).

There is a need for more research evidence concerning the relationship between religion and family strengths. Even though much has been written about religion and the family, recent research has largely ignored examining the relationships involved. Researchers have shown that the factors contributing to the strengths of marriage happiness are many, but, according to a recent study in Oklahoma, one of the more influential factors is that of religion (Stinnett, 1976). Even less research has been conducted concerning the concept of commitment in families.

There is a need for further research into the roles which religion and commitment play in strong families. Such research information would be of benefit: (a) to universities that have family life programs which train teachers for these programs which might involve religious influences, (b) family and individual counselors who work with families in attempting to strengthen them, and (c) ministers and churches who work in enriching family life. By being more aware of the influence religion has on the family and its potential for strengthening this relationship, educators, counselors, and ministers should be in a better position to work effectively with marriages and better interpret the potential that religious faith can have for families.

Purposes of the Study

The purposes of this study were:

1. To determine the perceptions of members of strong families concerning their degree of religious orientation.
2. To determine the perceptions of members of strong families concerning each of the following:

- A. Degree of commitment of spouse to respondent.
 - B. Degree of commitment of respondent to spouse.
 - C. Degree of commitment of child to respondent.
 - D. Degree of commitment of respondent to child.
 - E. Degree to which spouse stands by respondent when respondent is in trouble.
 - F. Degree to which respondent stands by spouse when spouse is in trouble.
 - G. Degree to which spouse is concerned with promoting respondent's welfare and happiness.
 - H. Degree to which respondent is concerned with promoting spouse's welfare and happiness.
3. To examine the following hypotheses:
- A. There is no significant relationship between Degree of Family Commitment Scale scores and sex.
 - B. There is no significant relationship between Degree of Family Commitment Scale scores and each of the following:
 - (1) Religious orientation
 - (2) Socio-economic status
 - (3) Place of residence
 - (4) Length of marriage
 - (5) Number of children.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research examining the perceptions and attitudes toward religion and family strengths is limited. The following review of related literature includes: (a) family strengths, (b) commitment, (c) the understanding of religion and its influence on family strengths, and (d) current research in religion and family strengths.

Family Strengths

Otto (1975) defined "family strengths" as

those forces, and dynamic factors in the relationship matrix which encourages the development of the personal resources and potentials of members of the family and which make family life deeply satisfying and fulfilling to family members (p. 16).

deLissovoy (1973) conducted a longitudinal study of high-risk marriages and discovered certain factors which helped sustain the marriage. High on his list of supportive factors were economic stability, psychological support and church activities.

Otto (1962, 1966) reported that the affective aspects of family life, specifically the giving and receiving of love, were the greatest sources of family strength. Doing things together as a family and sharing religious convictions were also found to be important for a strong family.

In a study of divorce applicants Levinger (1966) discovered that

the psychological and emotional support factors of a relationship were of greater concern to middle class spouses while financial matters and unstable physical actions of their partner were of greater concern to lower class spouses.

Otto (1963, 1975) included the following criteria in the development of a framework in which to view family strengths:

1. The ability to provide for the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of a family.
2. The ability to be sensitive to the needs of the family members.
3. The ability to communicate.
4. The ability to establish and maintain growth-producing relationships within and without the family.
5. The ability to provide support, security and encouragement.
6. The capacity to maintain and create constructive and responsible community relationships in the neighborhood and in the school, town, local and state government.
7. The ability to grow with and through children.
8. An ability for self-help, and the ability to accept help when appropriate.
9. An ability to perform family roles flexibly.
10. Mutual respect for the individuality of family members.
11. A concern for family unity, loyalty, and interfamily cooperation.
12. The ability to use crisis or seemingly injurious experience as a means of growth.

According to Levinger (1965) marital cohesiveness reveals

the strength of the marital relationship is a direct function of the attractions within and barriers around the marriage, and an inverse function of such attractions and barriers from other relationships (p. 19).

Family strengths, as described by Otto (1962), are those constantly changing, yet interrelated, elements within the family's subsystems.

In their totality these separate elements, or strengths, result in the formation of a strong family.

Levinger (1965) identified affectional rewards as one of the major factors in marital cohesion. Affectional rewards include esteem for spouse, desire for companionship, and sexual enjoyment; socio-economic rewards include husband's income, home ownership, husband's education, and husband's occupation; and similarity in social status, which includes religion, education and age.

In making a distinction between happily married couples and unhappily married couples Navran (1967) noted that happily married couples:

- (a) talk more to each other; (b) convey the feelings that they understand what is being said to them;
- (c) have a wider range of subjects available to them;
- (d) preserve communication channels and keep them open; (e) show more sensitivity to each other's feelings; (f) personalize their language symbols;
- and (g) make more use of supplementary nonverbal techniques of communication (p. 182).

Anthony (1969) stated that the family with a strong background responds to difficulties by pooling its resources and working out the most constructive solutions together. Research studies have shown that marriage happiness and stability was significantly higher among those families who have a high degree of religious orientation (Zimmerman and Cervantes, 1960; Bowman, 1974). Crockett, Babchuk, and Ballweg (1969) found that religious homogeneity between spouses is related to family stability for both Protestants and Catholics.

In his Family Strengths Research Project, Stinnett (1976) studied 99 strong families in Oklahoma. Five patterns emerged:

1. Family members expressed appreciation for one another.

2. They spent a great amount of time together as a family.
3. They experienced good communication.
4. They had a high degree of religious orientation.
5. They were committed to helping make each other happy.

Commitment

Commitment is a concept that serves as a basis for the existence of the family and other social structures, but because we live in a crises culture in which values are constantly changing, "it is hard to know what we should commit ourselves to" (O'Neill and O'Neill, 1974, p. 188). Current research has made few contributions to the area of commitment to the family.

Masters and Johnson (1974) defined commitment as "a pledge to do something. One person tells another, 'I promise,' and the promise is kept, the obligation fulfilled. Trust has been asked for; trust has been given; and trust has been repaid" (p. 251). In a relationship, commitment is "being involved to the point of finding an authentic response, a commitment to caring with time enough to find the essence of self and the other in our actions and thoughts" (O'Neill and O'Neill, 1974, p. 186).

In her study of commitment in 19th century American utopian communities, Kanter (1972) defined commitment as:

The willingness of people to do what will help maintain the group because it provides what they need. In sociological terms, commitment means the attachment of the self to the requirements of social relations that are seen as self-expressive (p. 66).

In her definition she further identifies three aspects of a social system that involve commitment: continuance, cohesion, and social control.

According to Becker (1960) sociologists have often used the idea of commitment as a variable to explain "consistent behavior." Three characteristics of this type of behavior are identified: (1) it persists over some period of time; (2) it involves great diversity of activities which serve him in pursuit of his goal; and (3) a rejection of other feasible alternatives.

Hobart (1961) discussed the urgent need for commitment within interpersonal relationships, especially the family, in order to insure the quality and duration of those relationships. He stated:

The very importance of these manifold relationships heightens the need for some relationships which are dependable; which can be, invariably, counted on; which will not be weakened or destroyed by the incessant moving about of people. Such secure relationships can only be found, given the structural peculiarities of our society today, within the family. Actualization of this security within the family depends upon commitment, a commitment symbolized in the phrase "in sickness and in health, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, till death do you part" (p. 48).

Sherif and Sherif (1964) observed that attachments among individual members of a group were patterned with respect to effective initiative or control, mutual liking, and particular functions in activities which were positively related to the motivations of the members. In a study conducted by Hilsdale (1962) he found that there were two types of personal commitment, ideal and existential. Ideal commitment is the commitment to the goal or the ideal of marriage, i.e., a permanent and exclusive union. In existential commitment to marriage the individual recognizes that something might go wrong, and he commits himself to making an attempt at the ideal goal yet recognizes that he may not achieve it.

Parsons, Shils, Allport, Kluckhohn, Murry, Sears, Sheldon, Stouffer

and Tolman (1951) stated that the processes which determine whether or not an individual will become committed, as well as the type and degree of commitment, to persons or groups (social objects) involve selection between alternative possibilities for commitment, and entails an orientation of action to the commitment. Masters and Johnson (1974) drew a sharp distinction in the value of commitment to the institution of marriage (social object) as opposed to a commitment of a couple to one another (persons). They concluded that commitment to one another was a stronger basis for a positive orientation of action.

According to Kanter (1972) there are six building processes which give strength to the commitment of individuals to a group, i.e., processes which will increase the unity, coherence and gratification of the group itself. These commitment building processes are:

1. The process of sacrifice asks members to give up something as a price of membership.
2. Through the process of investment the individual commits his "profit" to the group, so that leaving it would be costly.
Investment can be a simple economic process involving tangible resources or it can involve intangibles like time and energy.
3. Renunciation involves the relinquishing of relationships that are potentially disruptive to group cohesion, thereby heightening the relationship of the individual to the group.
4. Connectedness, belonging, participation in a whole mingling of the self in the group, equal opportunity to contribute and to benefit, all are part of communion.
5. Mortification processes provide a new identity for the person that is based on the power and meaningfulness of group member-

ship; the processes reduce his sense of a separate, private, unconnected ego. They facilitate a moral commitment on the part of the person to accept the control of the group, binding his inner feelings and evaluations to the group's norms and beliefs.

6. Transcendence is the process whereby a person comes to feel that the group is part of something greater than itself.

Kanter (1972) found that the presence of commitment mechanisms such as these was positively related to the group's endurance.

The Understanding of Religion and Its Influence on Family Strengths

For one to understand the influence of religion upon family life, a definition or understanding of the term "religion" must be attained. James (1902) stated that, "religion means the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the Divine" (p. 31). Dewey (1934) felt "whatever introduces a genuine perspective is religious" (p. 15). Hocking (1929) believed "religion is the habitual reference of life to divine powers" (p. 26). Randall (1946) wrote that all religions do the same things for men, "They are all man's quest for the divine and his attempt to order life in its light" (p. 22). He further stated that "all religions embrace a code for the guidance of living and a set of ideals toward which human life should be directed" (p. 23). Landis and Landis (1958) summarized the meaning of religion by showing that all religions emphasize the orientation of the individual to realities outside his physical existence. This aids people in maintaining

a perspective on life and its problems. Whatever helps people in their perspective on life and the world about them will increase their adequacy in a relationship such as marriage.

One thought central to the Judeo-Christian mentality is the individual. Ideally, a religious faith impels one toward unselfishness and sympathy for the needs of others. A marriage partner will increase the happiness of his relationships when living with this orientation.

Self-discipline is found in religion and is a quality which is a valuable asset for those who would work out happy relationships in marriage. The marriage will be smoother and happier for all if each member can be depended on to behave as a disciplined individual (Landis and Landis, 1958).

Religious thought emphasizes love, "love your neighbor as yourself," commitment, respect, mutual support and responsibility, "bear one another's burdens" (Galatians 6:2); patience and forgiveness, "Judge not lest you be judged" (Matthew 7:1); and the importance of fidelity, "thou shalt not commit adultery" (Matthew 5:27); "what God has joined together, let no man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6). All of these are qualities which, when incorporated into the marriage, would strengthen and stabilize it.

According to Johnson (1973) the emphasis some churches place on family study and family prayer undoubtedly contributes to the belief that religious involvement strengthens marriages. Also according to Johnson (1973), other influencing factors might include Biblical teachings and injunctions encouraging children to obey and honor their parents (Exodus 20:12), wives to submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5:21), and parents to teach their children (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

In addition to religious principles Blood (1969) points out that church attendance is a joint family activity and that there is evidence that any joint activity strengthens the family if it is rewarding and pleasant. Church attendance by the whole family can provide a source of group identity as they go out into the community together. Participating in church activities together can provide a source of joy and companionship for many couples.

Blood (1969), together with Zimmerman and Cervantes (1960), explains how religious participation also provides friendship support for stable marriages and family living. Church participation puts a couple in contact with other couples who have similar values as commitment, respect, love, responsibility, fidelity and forgiveness. These couples reinforce each other's values and encourage each other to strive for a higher level of interpersonal relationship as they interact and become friends. They reinforce each other's value for a stable, successful family life. Their friendship with each other tends to discourage irresponsible behavior and provides a type of social control.

Blood (1969) further explains that religion introduces the belief of deity into a marriage relationship. Awareness of God provides a sense of support and strength. This awareness tends to de-emphasize conflicts and has a healing, forgiving, reconciling influence. The awareness of God tends to contribute to the ability to forgive and the determination to promote the welfare and happiness of the spouse and other family members.

Current Research in Religion and Family Strengths

Within the last decade more examination into the influence of religion on marriage and family life has been made. Much of the findings simply correlate with earlier work, but with more sophisticated research techniques and greater knowledge within the area, a recognition of some of these findings should be made.

Snider (1972) reports from a study of 416 couples, as he researched into the relationships between religious affiliation and marital adjustment, that private and public religious practices of Bible reading, prayer and church attendance were all positively correlated with good marital adjustment. In general, it was demonstrated that members of those churches which are characterized by greater emotional participation in public services and who emphasize religious conversion score significantly higher on marital adjustment than those who are more liberal in terms of theology or more ritualistic in terms of public services. Swenson (1971) concluded from his study that the degree of religious involvement was the most important factor, rather than the church affiliation.

Various studies have been made with regard to church attendance and its influence upon the marriage. Levinger (1965) states that divorce prominence is inversely related to joint church attendance. Joint membership and regular attendance places a couple in a network of connected affiliations and exposes them to conventional values. An assumption might be that membership is a source of powerful external pressures. These pressures could even come into play to prevent the marriage from breaking up.

Nicholi (1974), in his research on university students who had experienced conversion, reported a marked improvement in ego functioning. Enhanced self-image, introspection, and increased depth in interpersonal relationships were found. Dependence on drugs, bad grades, and poor impulse control diminished. Existential despair decreased, as well as preoccupation with the passage of time and with death. These findings suggest that religious conversion may be a profoundly transforming experience.

Crockett, Babchuk and Ballweg (1969) note that attention should be given to marital adjustment and stability with regard to religiously mixed couples. The weakness in a relationship of this nature is that it causes more variables of wide variations to enter into the marriage and obscures the potential that the marriage could have. Their three hypotheses were affirmed in their study. They were:

Reasoning that diverse religious beliefs and practices within the nuclear family would tend to disrupt family life, we predicted that most changes in affiliation among the married pairs would be to a common faith or denomination. We expected further that religious homogeneity if not achieved near the time of marriage, would be attained while the couples' children were young. The potentiality for interpersonal strife arising from religious differences should be greatest at this time when the question of the children's religious identification and training is prominent. That church attendance and participation would be greater among wives in religiously homogeneous families than among those in families where the spouses maintained different religious affiliations (pp. 464-465).

They viewed their findings as being highly consistent with two generalizations: Religious homogeneity among spouses promotes family stability; the achievement of religious homogeneity among spouses as adults (near marriage or thereafter) promotes family stability to at least the same

degree as occurs among spouses reared in the same faith or denomination.

O'Brien (1971) looked into factors associated with family instability and found that in families who had been married five years or fewer, instability followed when (1) marriage followed the pregnancy of the wife, (2) the couples were not from similar social and religious backgrounds and (3) those in which the husband was not achieving well in his work and economic field.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURE

Selection of Subjects

The 157 subjects representing 99 families in this study were obtained throughout the 77 counties in Oklahoma. Cover letters (see Appendix) explaining the research study and assuring anonymity, were sent to approximately 180 families. Questionnaires were included for both husband and wife. They were requested to complete the questionnaires separately and not to compare answers. Therefore, the sample does not always contain responses from both members of the same family. A stamped, self-addressed return envelope was included with each questionnaire. The data were obtained during the months of March, April, and May, 1975.

The cooperation of the Cooperative County Extension Service was utilized in collecting the sample. The Extension Home Economists were considered to be reliable professionals to recommend strong families due to their training and competence in the area of home and family life, the degree of contact with families in their county, and their concern for strengthening family life.

The Extension Home Economists in each of the 77 counties in Oklahoma were sent letters requesting that they recommend two or more families in their county whom they felt were strong families. They were provided with guidelines for consideration in selecting these families.

The general guidelines were:

1. The family members appear to have a high degree of happiness in the husband-wife and parent-child relationship.
2. The family members appear to fulfill each others needs to a high degree.
3. The family is intact with both parents present in the home.
4. The family must have at least one school age child, 21 years or younger living at home.

An additional criteria was that the respondent must rate their marital happiness and satisfaction in the parent-child relationship as satisfactory or very satisfactory on the questionnaire.

The Instrument

The questionnaire was designed by Dr. Nick Stinnett, Associate Professor, Family Relations and Child Development Department, at Oklahoma State University. The questionnaire was designed to measure various aspects of family life which a review of the literature indicated were important components of family strength.

The questionnaire was presented to a panel of four judges, all of whom held advanced degrees in the area of family relations. They were asked to rate the items in terms of the following criteria:

1. Does the item possess sufficient clarity?
2. Is the item sufficiently specific?
3. Is the item significantly related to the concept under investigation?
4. Are there other items that need to be included to measure the concepts under investigation?

There was a high degree of agreement among the judges that the items met the four criteria. Suggestions made by the judges were incorporated into the final version of the instrument, and a pre-test was

administered to 20 families. Further modifications concerning the wording of questions and overall length of the questionnaire were made as a result of the pre-test.

For the present study, data from the following sections of the questionnaire (see Appendix) were used: (a) biographical information such as sex, age, and place of residence; (b) perceptions concerning degree of family religious orientation; and (c) questions concerning the degree of commitment among family members (Degree of Family Commitment Scale). The questions used to obtain the above information were fixed alternative and open ended.

Degree of Family Commitment Scale

The Degree of Family Commitment Scale was developed to measure the respondents' perceptions concerning degree of commitment present in their family (Leland, 1977). The Degree of Family Commitment Scale is composed of eight items which represent the respondents' perceptions concerning the degree of husband-wife and parent-child commitment, the degree to which husband and wife support each other in time of trouble, and the degree to which husband and wife are concerned with promoting each other's welfare and happiness. The eight items had five degrees of response, ranging from very high to very low. The responses were scored in such a way that the highest degree of commitment was given the highest numerical score and the lowest degree of commitment was given the lowest numerical score. As an index of the validity of the Degree of Family Commitment Scale an item analysis found that each item was significantly discriminating at the .001 level (Leland, 1977).

Analysis of the Data

A percentage and frequency count was used to identify the background characteristics of the respondents and also the respondents' perceptions of the following: (a) the degree of religious orientation in the family; (b) degree of commitment of spouse to respondent; (c) degree of commitment of respondent to spouse; (d) degree of commitment of child to respondent; (e) degree of commitment of respondent to child; (f) degree to which spouse stands by respondent when respondent is in trouble; (g) degree to which respondent stands by spouse when spouse is in trouble; (h) degree to which spouse is concerned with promoting respondent's welfare and happiness; and (i) degree to which respondent is concerned with promoting spouse's welfare and happiness.

The Kruskal-Wallis One Way Analysis of Variance (when comparing three or more groups), the Mann-Whitney U (when comparing two groups), and the Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient were used to analyze the following hypotheses:

1. There is no significant relationship between Degree of Family Commitment Scale scores and sex.
2. There is no significant relationship between Degree of Family Commitment Scale scores and each of the following:
 - (a) Religious orientation
 - (b) Socio-economic status
 - (c) Place of residence
 - (d) Length of marriage
 - (e) Number of children.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Description of the Subjects

A detailed description of the 157 subjects who participated in this study is presented in Table I. The sample consisted of 40.12 per cent males and 59.88 per cent females. Their ages ranged from 24 to over 50 years with the greatest percentage (30.57%) in the age group of 36-40 years.

Ninety-four per cent of the sample were White. Most of the sample (81.29%) were Protestant. As determined by the modified McGuire-White Index of Social Status (1955), the sample was primarily from upper-middle (41.03%) and lower-middle (39.10%) socio-economic classes. The largest proportion of the respondents (48.41%) indicated a farm or rural area as their place of residence and another 36.94 per cent indicated their residence as a small town under 25,000 population. An even higher proportion of the respondents (75.80%) reported that the wife was not employed outside the home.

TABLE I
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SUBJECTS

Variable	Classification	No.	Per Cent
Sex	Male	63	40.12
	Female	94	59.88
Race	White	147	94.23
	Black	6	3.85
	Indian	3	1.92
Age	20-25	2	1.27
	26-30	12	7.64
	31-35	33	21.02
	36-40	48	30.57
	41-45	44	28.03
	46-50	8	5.10
	over 50	10	6.37
Religion	Catholic	22	14.19
	Protestant	126	81.29
	Mormon	1	0.65
	None	6	3.87
Degree of Religious Orientation	Very Much	31	20.00
	Much	73	47.09
	Moderate	46	29.67
	Little	5	3.22
	Very Little	0	0.00
Socio-Economic Class	Upper	7	4.49
	Upper-Middle	64	41.03
	Lower-Middle	61	39.10
	Upper-Lower	21	13.46
	Lower-Lower	3	1.92
Place of Residence	On a farm or in country	76	48.41
	Small town under 25,000	58	36.94
	City of 25,000 to 50,000	11	7.01
	City of 50,000 to 100,000	9	5.73
	City over 100,000	3	1.91
Wife's Employment	Not employed outside home	119	75.80
	Employed full-time	38	24.20

Perceptions Concerning Degree of Religious
Orientation in the Family

The great majority of the respondents in this study indicated a high degree of religious orientation. As Table II illustrates, approximately 67 per cent of the respondents reported their degree of religious orientation as Very Much and Much. Only 3.22 per cent described their religious orientation as Little and none reported their degree of religious orientation as Very Little.

TABLE II
 PERCEPTIONS CONCERNING DEGREE OF RELIGIOUS
 ORIENTATION IN THE FAMILY

Degree of Religious Orientation	No.	Per Cent
Very Much	31	20.00
Much	73	47.10
Moderate	46	29.68
Little	5	3.22
Very Little	0	0.00

Perceptions Concerning Degree of Commitment

Among Family Members

As Table III indicates, a high degree of commitment was reported among family members. Approximately 94 per cent described the degree of commitment of the spouse to the respondent as Very High or High. Similarly, about 93 per cent of the respondents described their degree of commitment to their spouse as Very High or High. The degree of commitment of child to respondent was reported as Very High or High by approximately 89 per cent, and the degree of the respondents' commitment to the child was described as Very High or High by about 92 per cent of the respondents.

The degree to which the spouse stands by the respondent when the respondent is in trouble, and the degree to which the respondent stands by the spouse when the spouse is in trouble was described as Very High or High by 94 per cent and 96 per cent of the respondents, respectively. The degree to which the spouse is concerned with promoting the respondent's welfare and happiness was reported as Very High or High by about 91 per cent of the respondents. Approximately 94 per cent of the respondents described the degree to which they are concerned with promoting their spouse's welfare and happiness as Very High or High.

TABLE III
PERCEPTIONS CONCERNING DEGREE OF COMMITMENT
AMONG FAMILY MEMBERS

Description	No.	Per Cent
Degree of Commitment of Spouse to Respondent		
Very High	99	63.46
High	48	30.77
Average	9	5.77
Low	0	0.00
Very Low	0	0.00
Degree of Commitment of Respondent to Spouse		
Very High	97	61.78
High	50	31.85
Average	8	5.10
Low	2	1.27
Very Low	0	0.00
Degree of Commitment of Child to Respondent		
Very High	71	45.22
High	69	43.96
Average	13	8.28
Low	2	1.27
Very Low	2	1.27
Degree of Commitment of Respondent to Child		
Very High	91	57.96
High	53	33.76
Average	11	7.01
Low	2	1.27
Very Low	0	0.00
Degree to which Spouse Stands by Respondent When Respondent is in Trouble		
Very High	123	78.34
High	24	15.29
Average	7	4.46
Low	3	1.91
Very Low	0	0.00

TABLE III (Continued)

Description	No.	Per Cent
Degree to which Respondent Stands by Spouse When Spouse is in Trouble		
Very High	118	75.16
High	32	20.38
Average	4	2.55
Low	3	1.91
Very Low	0	0.00
Degree to which Spouse is Concerned with Promoting Respondent's Welfare and Happiness		
Very High	98	62.42
High	45	28.66
Average	13	8.28
Low	1	0.64
Very Low	0	0.00
Degree to which Respondent is Concerned With Promoting Spouse's Welfare and Happiness		
Very High	96	61.37
High	51	32.48
Average	10	6.37
Low	0	0.00
Very Low	0	0.00

Examination of the Hypotheses

Hypothesis I. There is no significant relationship between Degree of Family Commitment Scale scores and sex.

When this hypothesis was examined by the Mann-Whitney U test no significant difference was seen to exist between males and females concerning their degree of commitment on the Degree of Family Commitment Scale scores. As Table IV illustrates, a z value of -1.27 was seen, showing no significance.

TABLE IV
MANN-WHITNEY U VALUE REFLECTING RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN DEGREE OF FAMILY COMMITMENT SCALE
SCORES AND SEX

Sex	No.	Average Rank	z	Level of Significance
Male	63	77.15	-1.27	n.s.
Female	94	77.80		

Hypothesis II. There is no significant relationship between Degree of Family Commitment Scale scores and each of the following: (a) religious orientation, (b) socio-economic status, (c) place of residence, (d) length of marriage, and (e) number of children.

Hypothesis II(a): There is no significant relationship between Degree of Family Commitment Scale scores and religious orientation.

When the Kruskal-Wallis One Way Analysis of Variance was used to examine this hypothesis an H score of 5.25 was obtained, indicating that no significant relationship existed between degree of religious orientation and Degree of Family Commitment Scale scores. This finding may be due to the fact that very little variation existed in either the Degree of Family Commitment Scale scores or degree of religious orientation among the respondents.

Hypothesis II(b): There is no significant relationship between Degree of Family Commitment Scale scores and socio-economic status.

In analyzing this hypothesis the Kruskal-Wallis One Way Analysis of Variance revealed an H score of 2.22 which was not significant. As Table VI shows, no significant relationship was found to exist between Degree of Family Commitment Scale scores and socio-economic status.

TABLE V

H-SCORE REFLECTING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DEGREE OF
RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION AND DEGREE OF
FAMILY COMMITMENT SCALE SCORES

Degree of Religious Orientation	No.	Average Rank	H	Level of Significance
Very Much	31	91.55		
Much	73	75.03		
Moderate	46	71.43	5.25	n.s.
Little	5	97.80		
Very Little	0	00.00		

TABLE VI

H-SCORE REFLECTING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
DEGREE OF FAMILY COMMITMENT SCALE
SCORES AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

Socio-economic status	No.	Average Rank	H	Level of Significance
Upper	7	98.50		
Upper-Middle	64	78.28		
Lower-Middle	61	73.20	2.22	n.s.
Upper-Lower	21	76.95		
Lower-Lower	0	00.00		

Hypothesis II(c): There is no significant relationship between Degree of Family Commitment Scale scores and place of residence.

Table VII reveals that no significant relationship existed between Degree of Family Commitment Scale scores and place of residence. The Kruskal-Wallis One Way Analysis of Variance was used to analyze this hypothesis, and an H value of 1.86 was revealed, which was not significant.

TABLE VII
H-SCORE REFLECTING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
DEGREE OF FAMILY COMMITMENT SCALE
SCORES AND PLACE OF RESIDENCE

Place of Residence	No.	Average Rank	H	Level of Significance
On a farm or in the country	76	73.45		
Small town under 25,000	58	82.87		
City of 25,000 to 50,000	11	82.55	1.86	n.s.
City of 50,000 to 100,000	9	70.94		

Hypothesis II(d): There is no significant relationship between Degree of Family Commitment Scale scores and length of marriage.

When the Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient was used to examine this hypothesis no significant relationship was found to exist between number of years married and Degree of Family Commitment Scale scores as indicated by Table VIII.

Hypothesis II(e): There is no significant relationship between Degree of Family Commitment Scale scores and number of children.

The Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient indicated that no significant relationship existed between Degree of Family Commitment Scale scores and number of children. As Table VIII shows, a correlation coefficient of $-.05$ was found, which was not significant.

TABLE VIII
RELATIONSHIP OF DEGREE OF FAMILY COMMITMENT SCALE
SCORES TO NUMBER OF CHILDREN AND
NUMBER OF YEARS MARRIED

Description	Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient--DFCS scores	Level of Significance
Number of years married	.07	n.s.
Number of children	-.05	n.s.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of strong family members concerning their degree of religious orientation, and various aspects and degrees of commitment among members of the family.

The respondents were 157 individuals representing 99 families in Oklahoma. The subjects were classified as members of strong families as determined by previously mentioned criteria. They were primarily White, predominately from rural areas and small towns, and had at least one child 21 years or younger living at home. The data were collected during the months of March, April and May, 1975.

Percentages and frequencies were used to identify the respondents' perceptions concerning eight different aspects of their family relationships. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to examine the relationship between the Degree of Family Commitment Scale scores and sex. The Kruskal-Wallis One Way Analysis of Variance was used to examine the relationship between the Degree of Family Commitment Scale scores and each of the following: (a) religious orientation, (b) socio-economic status, and (c) place of residence. The relationship between length of marriage and number of children and Degree of Family Commitment Scale scores was examined by use of the Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient. The results were as follows:

1. A high degree of religious orientation was indicated by the majority of the respondents. Approximately 67 per cent reported their degree of religious orientation above the Moderate level, while only 3 per cent described their degree of religious orientation below the Moderate level.
2. A high degree of commitment was reported among family members in all eight categories of the Degree of Family Commitment Scale. The scale represents the respondents' perceptions concerning the degree of husband-wife and parent-child commitment, the degree to which husband and wife support each other in time of trouble, and the degree to which husband and wife are concerned with promoting each other's welfare and happiness. Approximately 89 per cent to 96 per cent of the respondents described their degree of commitment in each of the eight categories as being Very High or High. Only 2 per cent or less, in any given category, described their degree of commitment as Low or Very Low.
3. No significant difference was found to exist between males and females concerning their degree of commitment on the Degree of Family Commitment Scale scores.
4. No significant relationship was found to exist between the Degree of Family Commitment Scale scores and each of the following: (a) religious orientation, (b) socio-economic status, (c) place of residence, (d) length of marriage, and (e) number of children.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The majority of strong families in this study reported a high degree of religious orientation. This finding coincides with earlier research which showed that marriage happiness and stability was

significantly higher among those families who have a high degree of religious orientation (Zimmerman and Cervantes, 1960; delissovoy, 1973; Bowman, 1974). Other studies reported that various religious practices were positively correlated with good marital adjustment (Snider, 1972), and that divorce prominence and joint church attendance were inversely related (Levinger, 1965). Otto (1962, 1966) stated that the giving and receiving of love, which is central to most religious orientations, were the greatest sources of family strength. These results are not particularly surprising in view of the fact that the church is an institution which promotes attitudes and values which logically enhance the quality of interpersonal relationships.

The high degree of commitment reported by the respondents in this study reflects the idea that commitment is necessary within family relationships in order for those relationships to continue, and to insure the members of an ever-growing quality of interaction within the family (Hobart, 1961). Other research has shown that the various mechanisms of which the concept of commitment is composed are positively related to the family's endurance (Kanter, 1972). The Degree of Family Commitment Scale focuses on the commitment of an individual toward other members of the family rather than commitment to the institutions of marriage and family. The commitment to persons, rather than social objects, has been shown to be a stronger basis for a positive orientation of action (Masters and Johnson, 1974). The present findings also coincide with the conclusion of Masters and Johnson (1974) that commitment is the most important factor contributing to a satisfying sexual relationship.

The finding of this study that no significant relationship existed between Degree of Family Commitment Scale scores and degree of religious

orientation was probably due to the nature of the sample and the fact that very little variation existed in these two variables. Respondents in the sample expressed a very high degree of family commitment and religious orientation. If more variation had existed in the two variables the probability of finding a significant relationship would have been greatly increased.

Consideration should be given to further research in the area of family strengths and the various ways in which religion and commitment affect the family. The focus on family strengths would add a much-needed balance to present literature, much of which is oriented toward family problem areas. Studies of family strengths should be conducted among a more heterogeneous sample in order that information on different socio-economic classes could be studied and among families who come from urban and inter-city areas.

Curriculum planners in family life educational courses should be made aware of the importance of religion and commitment to family strengths. Consideration should be given to the possibility of including materials relating to these two concepts in all disciplines relating to family relations, i.e., sociology, psychology, counseling, etc. Through those who are trained in the helping professions information regarding the value of these concepts can be disseminated to individual families.

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APPENDIXES



OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY • STILLWATER

Department of Family Relations & Child Development
(405) 372-6211, Ext. 6084

74074

February 27, 1975

Dear Friend:

You and most other Americans may have often wondered, "How can family life be made stronger and more satisfying?". The Department of Family Relations and Child Development at Oklahoma State University is conducting a state-wide research project which is attempting to find answers to this question. You have shown an interest in improving your family life by the fact that you have chosen to gain greater understanding of your family situation through counseling. Because of this we thought you might be interested in this research project.

We would like to ask you to participate in this research by completing the enclosed questionnaire. There is a questionnaire for you and one for your spouse. If possible, would you both complete the questionnaires (please answer them separately and do not compare answers) and return them in the self-addressed, pre-paid envelope by March 25. If for some reason one of you can not assist with the research, we would greatly appreciate it if the other would send his or her questionnaire to us separately.

Your answers are anonymous and confidential since you are asked not to put your name on the questionnaire. Please answer each question as honestly as you can. We are not interested in how you think you should answer the questions, but we are interested in what you actually feel and do in your family situation.

It is expected that the information gained from this research will be of benefit to families and also of benefit to persons in the helping professions such as teachers, ministers, and counselors.

We appreciate your participation in this research. It is only through the contribution of persons such as you that we can gain greater understanding of marriage and family relationships.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Nick Stinnett, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Family Relations and Child Development

NS/dw
Enclosures

Oklahoma State University
Division of Home Economics

Department of Family Relations
and Child Development

Your cooperation in this research project is greatly appreciated. Your contribution in a research project of this type helps us to gain greater knowledge and insight into family relationships.

Please check or fill in answers as appropriate to each question. Your answers are confidential and anonymous since you do not have to put your name on the questionnaire. Please be as honest in your answers as possible. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. Family Member: Mother_____ Father_____
2. Race:
 1. White_____
 2. Black_____
 3. Indian_____
 4. Oriental_____
 5. Other_____
3. Age: _____
4. What church do you attend?
5. Who earns most of the income for your family?
 1. Husband_____
 2. Wife_____
 3. Other_____
6. What is the educational attainment of the husband?
7. What is the educational attainment of the wife?
8. Husband's Occupation:
9. Wife's Occupation:

10. Major source of income for the family:

1. Inherited savings and investments _____
2. Earned wealth, transferable investment _____
3. Profits, royalties, fees _____
4. Salary, Commissions (regular, monthly, or yearly) _____
5. Hourly wages, weekly checks _____
6. Odd jobs, seasonal work, private charity _____
7. Public relief or charity _____

11. Residence:

1. On farm or in country _____
2. Small town under 25,000 _____
3. City of 25,000 to 50,000 _____
4. City of 50,000 to 100,000 _____
5. City of over 100,000 _____

12. Indicate below how religious your family is: (rate on the 5 point scale with 5 representing the highest degree of religious orientation and 1 representing the least.)

1 2 3 4 5

13. Please rate the happiness of your marriage on the following 5 point scale (5 represents the greatest degree of happiness and 1 represents the least degree of happiness.) Circle the point which most nearly describes your degree of happiness.

1 2 3 4 5

14. Please rate the happiness of your relationship with your child on the following 5 point scale (5 represents the greatest degree of happiness and 1 represents the least degree of happiness.) Circle the point which most nearly describes your degree of happiness.

1 2 3 4 5

15. What would you most like to change about your marriage relationship?

16. What do you feel has contributed most to making your marriage satisfying?
17. What do you feel has contributed most to making your relationship with your child strong?
18. What would you most like to change about your relationship with your oldest child living at home?
19. Some people make us feel good about ourselves. That is, they make us feel self-confident, worthy, competent, and happy about ourselves. What is the degree to which your spouse makes you feel good about yourself? Indicate on the following 5 point scale (5 represents the greatest degree and 1 represents the least degree).

1 2 3 4 5

20. (a) What exactly does your spouse do that makes you feel good about yourself?
- (b) What exactly does your spouse do that makes you feel bad about yourself?
21. Indicate on the following 5 point scale the degree to which you think you make your spouse feel good about himself/herself. (5 represents the greatest degree and 1 represents the least).

1 2 3 4 5

22. What exactly do you do that makes your spouse feel good about himself?
23. Indicate on the following 5 point scale the degree to which your child makes you feel good about himself. (5 represents greatest degree and 1 represents the least).

1 2 3 4 5

24. What exactly does he/she do that makes you feel good about yourself?
25. Indicate on the following 5 point scale the degree to which you think you make your child feel good about himself/herself. (5 represents the greatest and 1 represents the least).

1 2 3 4 5

26. What exactly do you do that makes them feel good about himself/herself?

VITA²

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Master of Science

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Major Field: Family Relations and Child Development

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