An Interview Analysis on Perspectives on Personal Life Stressors across Generations

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Abstract

The writer will conduct an extensive interview analysis regarding individuals’ perspectives on personal life stressors. The analysis will first offer the reader a clear and concise definition of the term ‘stress’ and ‘family stress. The interviewer will also interweave the contexts of family stress and the concept of resilience in to the interviewee’s responses. The researcher will interview, by email, three participants, all from the same family, but of three different generations, concerning their perspectives on their own personal life stresses. The participants included in the research study will be specifically described, in great detail, in the analysis. The particular method conducted by the researcher, the questions posed to the participants, and the findings and results of the writer’s research will also be analyzed and clarified. Furthermore, the researcher will compare and contrast the participants’ responses and provide the reader with a multitude of similarities and differences among the interviewees’ beliefs of one another’s personal stressors. The importance of these critical life stressors will be argued and expounded upon too.

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Stress is the response to any physical, mental, or emotional motivation that imbalances the body’s emotions (Saichuk). Family stress is defined as distress or strain on the family unit (Boss 2002, chapter 2). Research reports 89% of adults express high levels of stress (Saichuk). Stress affects all families, regardless of family structure; however, particular families can cope and even become stronger due to stressful events, while others fall apart and crumble (Boss and Mulligan, chapter 15). The family includes both external and internal contexts in which stressors can occur. The external contexts consist of factors in which the family does not have control. In contrast, the internal contexts consist of factors in which the family does have control (Boss 2002, chapter 3). The external contexts include the historical context, economic context, development context, hereditary context, and cultural context. The external contexts influence how families understand and react to a stressful event. The internal contexts include the structural context, psychological context, and philosophical context. Understanding the internal contexts are critical, because these are the factors families can choose to change if necessary (Boss 2002, chapter3). Some families have the ability to grow, adapt, and “bounce back,” or be resilient, after experiencing family stress and hardships (Boss 2002, chapter 4). In this interview analysis, themes of external family contexts and resilience are interconnected in the three family members’ interviews about their most stressful life events.

**Results**

 The participants in this study comprised of three Caucasian, middle-class females all from the same family, but of three different generations. For the purpose of confidentiality, all three of the participants will remain unnamed throughout this interview analysis. The youngest participant, 23 years of age currently residing in Istanbul, Turkey, in this research study notes the most stressful time in her life thus far has been living and working in Istanbul, Turkey for the past two years. She explains after much thought how she concluded this to be her most stressful life event, “At first, I wanted to say it was working at the newspaper [*Today’s Zaman*] here. That was very stressful. Not only were the hours long and the job itself demanding, but my editor also belittled my work, didn't seem to care about quality and regularly made domestic violence jokes to/about me (because I wrote about gender-based violence quite often). It was a toxic workplace.” However, she explains how she realizes she made great friends and memories there. She continues on to explain the real most stressful event in her life, “I realized, though, that the truth is, and this is hard to admit, Turkey in general has been very stressful experience. It is hard to admit, because I feel I am often not honest about this with others and myself. Moving to Turkey was the best decision I've ever made.” This interviewee learned a new language, how to navigate a foreign country and culture all on her own. She discovered her passion in Turkey, women’s rights and empowerment, fell head-over-hells in love, made a slew of incredible and inspiring friends, and honed her writing skills. However, she feels frustrated and tired constantly in this foreign setting. The youngest interviewee recollects, “I lost something, I think, an important part of me along the way...my spunk. I am still happy and a positive person, of course. But not being able to smile and act myself on the streets because I am harassed everyday has impacted me more than I realized.” She realizes she has changed her dress, her attitude, and herself in fear of being harassed while living in Turkey these past two years. She describes how everything is harder there; however, “It has been the most exciting and frustrating, inspiring and mind-numbing, and empowering and defeating experience ever.” The youngest interviewee is experiencing stress in the external context of culture. The morals and beliefs of her culture conflict with the ideals of the Turkish culture she is currently living in, which causes her distress and anxiety. The stress is occurring in an external context, not allowing her to control or change the situation, only increasing the anxiety level even more. Because her subculture group clashes with the culture group she lives in, this creates a constant and critical stressor in her life (Boss 2002, chapter 3).

 The middle-aged participant, 54 years of age, mother of the youngest participant and daughter of the oldest participant, notes the most stressful event in her life is the day her oldest daughter, the youngest interviewee participant in this analysis, moved to a foreign country. After graduating from LSU, her oldest daughter accepted an internship abroad in Istanbul, Turkey with a deadline of four months. She explains, “At the time, though it was hard, having one of my girls, move away, did not seem unbearable, because I thought it was for only four months. The four months has turned into almost two years now.” Being able to travel a quick one hour drive to Baton Rouge to console or celebrate her daughters is the reason her daughter’s relocation is extremely stressful for her. The travel to Turkey is more than twenty-four hours by plane. The mother expresses her worry and concern for her daughter every day. She dreads the thought of being so far away from her daughter. She explains, “Not a day goes by that I do not wonder if she is safe, taking care of herself, or if she is walking home by herself at night. There are days I feel so helpless, because she is so far away, but all I can rely on is prayer.” The middle-aged interviewee is experiencing stress in the external context of the developmental context. The departure of her oldest daughter to a foreign country creates a new family structure. The middle-aged interviewee feels helpless and not in control to change the situation, which makes the event even more stressful (Boss 2002 chapter 3).

The oldest participant, 87 years of age, grandmother of the youngest participant and mother of the middle-aged participant, in this research study notes the most stressful event in her life is her survival of Hurricane Betsy, at age twenty-two, in 1947. She was at a hurricane party on the beach when Hurricane Betsy hit at 150 miles per hour and with twelve feet of water. Her and her friends were forced to make a life line with water rushing over their heads. She remembers piling into the car with her friends, attempting to dodge falling trees everywhere. She and her younger sister stayed at an American Red Cross station for two weeks during the aftermath of the storm. Once returning back to their home, they were welcomed by destruction, looters, alligators, and snakes. The oldest interviewee coped with stress in the historical context of external contexts. Hurricane Betsy was a destructive, life threatening event that was beyond her control. Having her home in shambles and family displaced, due to a natural disaster that she could not affect, left her feeling confused and disoriented (Boss 2002, chapter 3).

**Discussion**

Each participant was asked what they believe the other participants’ most stressful time in their life was. None of the interviewees predicted each other’s most stressful life event correctly. When asked about the youngest participant’s most stressful life event, the participant’s mother and grandmother perceived differing answers than from what the youngest interviewee reported. The youngest participant’s mother and grandmother believed her most stressful life event was the break up with her boyfriend whom she met in Turkey. The youngest participant’s mother and grandmother explain that this boyfriend was thought to be a future son-in-law. The youngest interviewee talked about coming back to the United States to pursue this relationship before it ended so abruptly. The youngest participant was forced to cope and deal with this heartbreak by herself in Turkey, without the support of her friends and family close by.

When asked about the middle-aged participant’s most stressful life event, the daughter and mother of this participant both reported differing accounts from the middle-aged participant’s actual event. Both the daughter and the mother believed the most stressful life event for their relative was the divorce of her husband, but they perceived the highest amount of stress at different times of the relationship. The daughter of the middle-aged participant believed her mother’s most stressful time of her life was the period right before her husband moved out of the house. The daughter remembers her mother’s and father’s relationship being tumultuous and unhealthy for a long time, but the several months before he finally moved out seemed to be filled with more fighting, cursing, yelling, door-banging and crying than she recalls ever happening before. The mother of the middle-aged interviewee perceived her daughter’s most stressful life event to be the actual divorce of her daughter’s marriage of twenty-five years. The mother explains how her daughter attempted to make her marriage work, but to no avail when she discovered her husband was involved with their good friend. The middle-aged participant’s mother praises how resilient her daughter is, creating her own business and raising her three daughters alone.

When asked about the oldest participant’s most stressful life event, the granddaughter and daughter both perceived different accounts from the oldest participant’s actual event. The oldest participant’s granddaughter believed her grandmother’s most stressful time of her life was the death of her grandmother’s husband. Her granddaughter remembers her grandmother still pouring her husband’s glass of wine each night after he passed away. She continued to follow the daily routine and schedule he had planned for himself, even though he was no longer with her anymore. The oldest participant’s daughter perceived her own mother’s most stressful event as the evacuation, destruction, and rebuilding of her life after Hurricane Katrina. Her mother was forced to evacuate to Tennessee for a year, while her house and life were being restored back home. Everything she owned, pictures, keepsakes, and treasures, were all lost or ruined from the storm. Her mother found the strength to rebuild and move on with a new life.

**Conclusion**

After analyzing the three participants’ responses to the interview question, the researcher compared and contrasted the different replies. All of the interviewees’ most stressful life events occurred in the external contexts. Each interviewee described feelings of helplessness and confusion. By comparing each interviewee’s major life stressor to the ABCX family stress management model, one can infer the severity of the crisis was major, but each individual interviewee displayed resilience. The hardship of each major crisis, moving to Turkey, coping with a family member being in a foreign country, and experiencing Hurricane Betsy, represents the A in the model (Crosbiee-Burnett). The resources of the family or individual, establishing great friendships abroad, still being in contact with her daughter, and relying on the American Red Cross station for help, represents the B in the model. The perception of the event as threatening, being harassed in Turkey, not being able to ensure her daughter’s safety, and being forced to make a life line to stay alive, represents the C in the model. These three components conclude how severe the stressor or crisis is, representing the X in the model (Walker). Each participant in this interview analysis perceived her own crisis as severely stressful; however, each interviewee portrays resilience after their times of crisis. The youngest participant developed lasting friendships and discovered her passion for women’s rights. The middle-aged participant relies on technology today to still communicate and stay in touch with her daughter abroad. The oldest participant in the interview analysis restored her home and life after the storm and now appreciates the beautiful beaches of Mississippi. Family resilience is defined as more than just enduring a crisis, but growing stronger because of the stressful event (Boss 2002, chapter 1). All of these individuals portray resilience, which will only allow them to overcome more stressful situations in their future.

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