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A Practice Research on the Intervention of Group Social Work in “the Absence of Father’s Role” in Family Education

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ABSTRACT

Our country has offered plenty of literature on family education in ancient time. After stepping in modern times, as the people turned to value education, family education, a key part of education has been attached with increasingly high importance. Based on social role theory, this research applied participant observation and semi-structured interview to collect data from the families in communities, and analyzed the absence of father’s role due to role conflict based on these data, in turn applied the method of group social work to assist father in relieving the problem of role conflict, help restore the father’s role in family education. In addition, through survey and the implementation of group social work research, to consider more the role of father before entering the group in the practice of father’s role in group social work intervention in family education, also to address the problems of less peer support, and poor social work concept at early stage, the research provided operable recommendations, e.g.: improve the social workers’ personal ability, optimize role awareness, unite all stakeholders to assist in family education, to be used for reference by similar groups.

Keywords: Family education, role conflict, absence of role, group social work, practice

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I. Introduction: the Issue on the Absence of Father's Role

In traditional society, father played little role in family education. Mr. Fei Xiaotong ever described such a scene in *Jiangcun Economy*, not until night fall, after busy work, would a father hug his child in arms awkwardly. In traditional family system, father played the role as the hub, also a bond between families and the society.¹ While in modern society, the role of father as a hub between families and the society gets weaker and weaker, relevant reports started to shape the images of good father,² aiming to give play to the positive role of father in family education. However, due to the impact of the traditional idea on gender role "husbands go out to make money and wives take care of the family" and the like, the participation of father in family education still lagged.

Regarding father's role the research discussed more about the function and importance of father's role systemically, but discussed less about how to promote the role of father in family education. This is a key part of this research. This research mainly aims to make some explorations on how to promote the regression of father's role based on social role theory. It interviewed with some families that have school-agers, which were randomized from the communities around schools in Yuquan District, Huhehaote, analyzed the inherent problem of absence of father's role based on the data collected by interview and non-participant observation, in turn designed the content of group work of the school-ager families, in order to promote the regression of father's role, and develop

practical experiences.

II. Theoretic perspective and research design

(I) Theoretic perspective

Social Role Theory comes from the "symbolic interactionism" of Mead, a U.S. social psychologist.³ According to Social Role Theory, social role refers to a whole set of code of rights and obligations and behavior patterns of the people which match their social status and identity, and it is the base of a social group or organization.⁴ The role "father" plays a different but very important role in the growth of children. He can set examples for his kids, help his kids build positive awareness. Through unique personal role orientation, a father can impose significant impact on the physical and mental growth of his kids in the interaction with them, thereby promoting their sound development.

According to Social Role Theory, the role "father" is indispensable for the growth of children. This research studied the role of father in family education, discussed the status of absence of father's role today and analyzed the underlying reasons, attempted to intervene by means of social work group, to promote the regression of father's role in the growth process of children.

(II) Research design

Based on Social Role Theory, to provide the research with richer data, the author mainly applied the non-participant observation and semi-structured interview methods to collect data. The research randomized a community geographically classified as "School District", to study the families that have school-agers in this community.

First, the author randomized 15 groups of family

¹Wang Yulei. Disembedding and Reembedding of Father: Parenting Relationship and Family Ethics in Modern Society [J]. China Youth Study, 2020(03):63-70.

²Huang Fenglan. The Evolution Of Father's Role and Function in the 21st Century——based on the Reports of China Education Newspaper 2000-2017 on Father and Parenting Education [J]. Journal of Wuyi University,

2018,37(07):73-79.

³[U.S.] George Herbert Mead Mind, Self, and Society [M]. Translated by Zhao Yuese, Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 1992.

⁴Zheng Hangsheng. New Introduction to Sociology [M]. China Renmin University Press, 1987:126

members (see Table 1 for details) from the community in Yuquan District, Huhehaote, and conducted semi-structured interview from four general dimensions, i.e.: family basic information, roles assumed, roles needed, roles expected, Then the author categorized and encoded the

data obtained in the interview with such interviewees, dividing it into two dimensions, i.e.: basic information and role, in turn performed discourse analysis over the “absence of father’s role”.

Table 1 List of Interviewees

SN	No.	Number of family members	Age of parents	How long they have lived in the community
1	J1	4	Over 30	About 10 months
2	J2	3	35	More than 20 years
3	J3	3	36	A few months
4	J4	5	36	8~9 years
5	J5	3	46	More than 20 years
6	J6	6	Over 50	Blank
7	J7	Blank	Over 30	Blank
8	J8	4	37	3 years
9	J9	3	36	Moved in not long ago
10	J10	3	Born in 1970s	15~16 years
11	J11	3	38	3 years
12	J12	4	Over 40	5 years
13	J13	3	35	More than 2 years
14	J14	5	50	10 years
15	J15	3	40	10 years

Notes: “blank” means “No information available”.

Second, applying non-participant observation, the author observed all the observable conditions of the interviewees including basic information, family education environment, main housemates, and gathered the data from the two channels together, in order to provide the research with richer data, and improve the pertinence of the subsequent services.

III. Analysis on the present situation of father’s role in family

(I) The present situation of father’s role

1. Interrole conflict

Interrole conflict refers to the conflict between

the different roles one play. The men interviewees are not only father, husband, but also a company staff, and there is conflict between these roles.

In the role as father, he overlooked his role in educating and accompanying kids, in most cases, he just played the role in supporting mother’s decision, or the role as head of the family. His concern focused on how to maintain sustained income source for the family, and he was busy with making money all day long. In the role as husband, he just played the role as a supporter, seldom participated in children education. The role

as an employee consumed most of his energy and time, on this regard, the interviewee said what he could do is to endeavor in achieving better job performances, try to increase income for the family. Facing his role conflict, father chose to play well the role as the provider of family income source, thereby realizing a balance in current role conflict, in other words, he attempted to remedy his role absence in normal moneys with money.

I didn't (check my kid's homework), you know, everyday I'm busy with guest reception, really have no more energy to care for his learning. The kid tells everything to his mother, he is looked after by his mother. For more information, you can ask his mother. (J2)

"I worked in office all day long, I'm busy, I really get very tired after work! I just hope to have a rest after returning to home. Sometimes I'm too tired to say a word. The moment if he comes over to ask a question, I have to teach him patiently. But now I'm older, I can't ensure I still have so good patience. He is annoying, sometimes, when I answer a mobile message beside his desk, he immediately requests for fiddling with the mobile phone, saying because I do so, although he has not finished the homework! (J3)

2. Intrarole conflict

Intrarole conflict refers to the conflict that one encounters in one role. In the interview, the father chose the first in the two options: "strict father", "loving father".

In the family, father usually plays a "strict" role. Due to the impact of the notion "father is strict, mother is loving", father would consciously play well such a role. He pretends to be very serious in front of his kids, and he is the immediate corrector of kids' mistakes, known as the unchallengeable man in the family. But at the bottom of a father's heart, he hungers for intimacy with kids, eager to express love in his way. He hopes to be

respected instead of feared by his kids, meanwhile, he is afraid of losing the status of authority because of such intimacy.

His mother praised him more often than me. To be honest, I quite agree with the notion "father is strict, mother is loving". If I talk with him in a mild tone, I'm afraid he would not follow me. (J4)

I'm responsible for settling the mistake of my kid. In general, he will stay away in such cases. He just plays a frightening role. If I warn the kid, "daddy will beat you up if you commit again next time", he will correct the mistake immediately. (J3)

3. Role conflicts outside the role

The conflict occurring between two or more roles is called role conflicts outside the role, although in the role as a father, he also has interest in borrowing the practices of other fathers.

When making a choice, a father may consider "how other fathers" would do with this problem, and if a practice has been adopted by most people, he will give tacit consent to it.

(II) Causal analysis on the status quo of father's role

1. Role switching ability is poor, general family education awareness needs optimizing

Parents are an important factor in the living and developing environment of their kinds, what they bring to the kinds are not only external impact, but also the comfort of heart. Parents play different roles, but they are less skilled in role switching, and parents still can't go out of the traditional family education pattern "father is strict, mother is loving". Such a pattern kidnapped their thoughts so tightly that they couldn't make some bold explorations. If things go on like this, the interaction between parents and kids will be restrained by pattern, neither party would feel free will and comfort. Parents must have the relearning ability, think over the patterns "husbands go out to make money and wives take care of the

family”, “father is strict, mother is loving” from a correct perspective. These are outdated notions, already lag behind the times, go opposite to the curiosity of children about everything, stop children exploring new things. Parents need optimize their family education concepts, improve their personal ability of role switching, in order to do better in family education.

2. Inter-role conflict is hard to balance, family education ability needs improving

In modern society, most parents are busy with their work and personal living, heavy job burden has consumed a lot of their energy, they hope to relax and rest after work. Physical fatigue distracts their concern on the management of kid management, and over time family education tends to be overlooked and lag behind. As parents are less skilled in balancing the inter-role conflict, while inter-role conflict occurred very often, parents had no good ways to balance it.

3. Role awareness is weak, herd mentality is severe

The understanding on father’s role is narrow, and basic disciplining and necessities are regarded as enough for this role, or father may provide conditions including fund, environment for learning depending on kids’ requirements. Particularly, when a father saw other kids rush to cram school, he would raise money to send his kids to cram school. It is just an example of the herd mentality, every time they have difficulties in making a choice, they would follow the crowd. They lacked of diverse understanding and cognition on this role, accordingly, they had no

clearer selection methods or selection standard for something, “crowd choice” becomes the basis for a father to make a choice.

IV. Exploration on the practice of the intervention of group social work in father’s role in family education

(I) Basic information of group

1. Basic concept of group

Communications with the families in this community show that, the families of this community have steady source of income, which can satisfy their daily living expenses basically. Most families said they were satisfied with the property management services, and facility of their estates, and felt comfortable toward their living environment. According to the status quo of father’s role in family education in the context of that the essential survival needs are satisfied, we taught father the knowledge of role balancing and family education, in the meantime, with the help of peer support system of group, and the support system of families, promote the regression of father’s role in family education.

2. Information of member groups

Through publicity by WeChat, referral and visits of social workers, we enrolled 6 groups of families in “Father Participation Group”, each group has 3-4 members per time. Aged 35-50, all the fathers accepted the service voluntarily, and wished to learn something about family education, improve their family education ability, promote the regression of father’s role in family education, make father play greater role in family education.

Table 2 Information of group members

SN	No.	Age of father	Number of participants
1	F1	44	2-3
2	F2	35	2-3
3	F3	35	3-4
4	F4	40	3-4

5	F5	48	3-4
6	F6	37	3-4

3. Design of “Father Participation Group” scheme

To provide group services, aim to address the problem of the absence of father’s role without compromising daily life.

(1) Objectives of group

The objectives of group include general objective and itemized objectives. General objective: to assist fathers in recognizing and understanding their roles, in turn find ways to balance difference roles, promote the regression of father’s role. Itemized objectives: first, recognize, understand roles; second, learn to apply role balance method; third, achieve role balance, promote the regression of father’s roles.

(2) The time and place of activities

As group social work aims to provide the families with the techniques of improving family education modes, after the end of every group activity, we need give each family some time to reinforce the techniques they learnt and do the assignment, accordingly, we decide to organize a group activity every Sunday at community multi-function room.

(3) Resource preparation

The practice of group activity needs various resources including manpower, supplies, fund, which forms a complete resources portfolio together. Unless we own it can the practice go ahead completely as planned.

As far as human resources, we defined the roles of manpower according to the activity content. We arranged a special person to act as the leader of group activities, who is responsible for the overall planning of the entire group social work practice, including the organization of each activity, documentation. As far as materials and financial resources, we need borrow from the community through application in advance, and link resources, so as to ensure there are adequate material and financial resources available for the activities.

4. Group activity plan

“Father Participation Group” support group will organize activities for total 7 times, and we predict it will take place once a week. Each activity is mainly led by 1 social worker, assisted by 2 social workers, and all activities surround the group objectives.

Table 3 Scheduling of group activity

Length of activity		Topic
1	60min	Group team building and role recognition
2	80min	Understand role 1
3	80min	Understand role 2
4	80min	Learn to play role 1
5	80min	Learn to play role 2
6	60min	Role balance
7	40min	Role balance and group summary

Group social work service intervention mainly aims to guide families to integrate the group,

explain the group objective, brief the subsequent services, while helping members know more

about the group, teach them the knowledge of family education, e.g.: the communication method of family education, the interaction modes of family education, some knowledge about Satir Family Therapy, in order to progressively increase the members' knowledge of family education according to their absorption ability and feedback ability. After the members possessed a certain knowledge, we further explain to the members the importance of father's role in family education, encourage mother and kids to take father back into the family education, help father play greater roles in family education, promote the regression of father's role in family education.

(II) The process of group social work practice

1. Implementation of group practice

At mid stage of the group practice, we organized group services for times for 6 groups of families, i.e.: push forward group formation, teach family education knowledge and techniques, guide families to recognize the importance of father's participation in family education, guide families to hold family meeting, guide father to communicate with kids and reinforce the knowledge they learnt.

(1) At early stage of group practice, focus on teaching of role cognition

At early stage, our main work is to help social workers and families get to know each other, reduce the vigilance of family members, create a warm and comfortable environment.

The main objective of group activities at early stage is to improve the relation between social workers and group members, between group member and group member, establish mutual trust between them, increase the frequency of interactions within the group, help group members clearly understand the group objectives, improve teamwork sense of members, to ensure they could work together to achieve the group

objectives. While improving the group cohesion and teamwork sense, we taught members the knowledge of role cognition, to promote the development of the group.

I was a little nervous at the beginning, but later I was attracted by the teacher's lecture, actually I liked it very much, and learnt a lot from it. (F3)

I'm sorry for late arrival today. The atmosphere here is very good, we have fun with our kids while learning knowledge, I think I learnt a lot. (F4)

(2) At mid stage of the group practice, activate pro-activity of members, guide members to understand the "role" step by step

Early stage focused on learning. Now we entered learning + practice stage. Members are not just an audience of social worker any more, but interact and share with social workers.

In the process of role cognition, we changed the activity form from family party to family meeting, and the restrictions of pattern requires more participation of father's role.

At the very beginning, we would arrange family members to support on the spot, assist father in understanding role based on his cognition on each role, realizing the responsibilities behind each role, give play to the roles progressively.

At the first family party, father did cooking voluntarily, we had dinner happily together, and talked at table. I offered the speaking chances to kids' father. He talked a lot with kid in the whole process. (F1)

At the meeting, I reminded him of supporting kid, encouraging kid. Later my kid told me, Dad is so kind. (F5)

(3) At late stage of the group practice, reinforce the change of members already occurring, and comfort members at farewell

As the knowledge tends to be more difficult at late stage, social workers continually tried their best to leverage the successful experience of the

past to help members learn and tackle new knowledge, endeavor in achieving role balance based on their recognition and understanding on the role. Second, at late stage, we tested the effect of the effect of group social work services and reinforce the change and outcome that members already realized. The main work of social workers at this stage is to further help members understand themselves, reinforce what they have learnt.

2. Group evaluation

In this group practice, we introduced process evaluation and outcome evaluation. We documented every group activity in the process of group social work, and perform process evaluation, including member's performance, the role and performance of social workers, content and form of group, time and place of activities, to test the growth of the group.

The evaluation is performed in two ways, questionnaire survey and group behavior observation. The main objective is to test whether members have certain cognition on roles, and whether they can apply what they have learnt to make a choice when they face role conflicts. Questionnaire evaluation refers to an evaluation conducted by handing out questionnaires to participants at late stage, member behavior observation refers to an evaluation by means of observing the change of member behavior depending on helpers, in order to evaluate the extent to which the goal for helping father recognize role, understand role, and find the ways to balance different roles on this basis, and promoting the regression of father's role has been accomplished.

The result of questionnaire survey and member behavior observation show that, 87% objective has been accomplished

V. Reflection and suggestions on the practice of the intervention of group social work in

father's role in family education

Based on the survey of family education and the services of family education finished at previous stages, the author made a reflection on the practice of the intervention of group social work in father's role in family education, and thereby proposed pertinent suggestions on the subsequent practice.

(I) Reflection on the practice of the intervention of group social work in father's role in family education

1. Consider well father's original role before entering the group

In the group practice of family education "Father Participation", we may encounter some problems we didn't thought of. Social workers must take into good consideration the original roles of father, the original scenarios of the family, and performed analysis over the original role of father. In case of role conflict, role confusion, etc., social workers must intervene in and provide guidance immediately, summarize the role conflicts already occurring, clear up confused roles. Social workers must make good preparations before each group activity, in order to minimize adverse contingencies, settle conflict or chaos timely if any.

2. Peer support needs improving

In the group practice, peer group plays an indispensable part in maintaining and developing the connections within the group. First, establish good communication within the group. In a peer group, good communication can give rise to strong support and encouragement, and it is also helpful for the steady development of the whole group. Second, in process of group learning, it provides peer group with more chances to learn knowledge and skills from each other, and to influence each other, improves the learning effect of community family education, diversifies learning modes, optimizes practicing paths. We can

leverage peer support system to improve knowledge learning and push forward the learning of the subsequent content.

3. The idea of social work is ambiguous at early stage

In the group practice, at early stage, social worker mainly served as an educator, aiming to teach the father the knowledge of family education; at mid stage, their work focused on guiding father to make attempt to communicate with their kids. Social workers shall recognize every role the father plays timely, perform role analysis, and respect the learning pattern the father selected, in addition, they shall start to consider well "people in environment", thereby designing customized family meeting mode according to the status of the father in family.

(II) Suggestion on the practice of the intervention of group social work in father's role in family education

1. Improve the ability of social workers

The father's role in family education is not a new issue of family education, but the arrangement of social workers in the intervention practice of group social work was not considerate at early stage, the personal ability of role switching appeared poor, the guidance to group lacked of interaction, all these problems reflect the deficiency in the personal ability of social workers. Social workers must be ready to learn at anytime, actively follow up new hot issue, continually "re-charge" themselves, to provide better service in every task.

2. Optimize role awareness

Everybody is playing different roles every day, and different role represents different responsibilities. In this practice research the author found that, most people have no clear role awareness. We need further increase role awareness in the subsequent work, help the group recognize that roles is the foundation of group or organization,

promote canonical conduct and good manner of group.

3. Unite multiple stakeholders to promote family education together

Family education is an enormous and complicated project, and it requires good division and cooperation between different parts of the society. For so large a project, a group practice is like a cup of water pouring on a mountain fire, what else we need do include: unite the internal resources of community, realize the optimization of such resources, provide relevant books, link excellent social organizations to provide services, weave long-term support network, gather all stakeholders to improve family education.

VI. Conclusion

The research focused on the analysis over the absence of father's role due to role conflict, and attempted to intervene in the father's role in family education through group social work, help solve the issue of role conflict, realize the regression of father's role. On the one hand, applying the mode of group social work, we can gather fathers together, to form an ever-growing, ever-developing group having love and common objective, increase peer support, establish robust supporting system, provide members with the chances to learn from each other, help each other, listen to each other's problem, share techniques with each other, work together to achieve group objective; on the other hand, group social work is of greater significance in helping discover, inspire, and improve the initiatives of father, bring him more courage to master the techniques of role balance, improve the current situation of family education.

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