



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**ASSIMILATION, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS, AND FAMILY
FUNCTIONING AMONG IRANIAN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES IN
MANCHESTER, ENGLAND**

MANDANA ALEMI

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MANCHESTER, ENGLAND**

By

MANDANA ALEMI

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MANDANA ALEMI

October 2010

Chair: Halimatun Halaliah Mokhtar, PhD

Faculty: Educational Studies

Emigration from one country to another with different cultural conditions involves a great risk for an immigration crisis that can lead to great strain and stress, which in turn affects family life negatively. Immigration places immigrant families in a new situation in which values, norms, experiences, and roles are questioned and in which family members come into conflict with one another. In order to survive in the new situation, families may strive toward a harmonious existence within the host society. As social system and values differ across countries, the process of assimilation is always needed. Based on the problems mentioned, this study attempted to elicit the process of assimilation, to investigate the psychological distress, and to explore the patterns of family functioning among Iranian immigrant families in Manchester, Britain.

The design of this study was mixed-methods with qualitative and descriptive methods that comprised the clinical interview and survey. The sampling design was purposive



with snowball method. The sample consisted of 30 Iranian immigrant families with an adolescent residing in Manchester, Britain who volunteered to participate. Three Assimilation Indices (Cochrane, 1993) measured the level of assimilation and General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg & Hiller, 1979) assessed the psychological distress. Standardized Clinical Family Interview (Kinston & Loader, 1984) was utilized to elicit the patterns of family functioning and to compare the patterns of family functioning between healthy and distressed families. A model for assimilation and patterns of family functioning among families, as well as in each assimilation strategy was finally developed.

Descriptive analyses showed that daughters were the ones who assimilated more and mothers less among family members. There was a higher assimilation level in healthy family members than in distressed ones, and higher psychosomatic disorders in females than in males. Healthy families in comparison with distressed families showed fewer conflicts, more cohesion and adaptability, open communication, more satisfaction with marital and parent-adolescent relationships, more flexibility in family roles, more power sharing and consistency in child rearing between parents, and more congruency with the environment. Regarding the interaction of family functioning and assimilation, low-assimilated families showed more cohesion, parental consistency in child rearing, religious attitudes, relationship with the relatives and problems related to immigration, compared to high-assimilated families. On the other hand, high-assimilated families showed more flexibility in family roles, relationship with the host society, and congruency in values with those of the environment.



Examining the mode of assimilation among families, three different models emerged. Half of migrant families chose *Bi-Cultural* strategy in response to the new society; others followed a *separation* and *marginalization strategies*. The patterns of family functioning in each model were developed.

It can be concluded that the family strengths, which are the characteristics of healthy families, can help migrated families cope successfully with their new life situation. Iranian mothers in this study were increasingly gaining more power in family functions and Iranian fathers had not much power in decision-making and control over their families. It was concluded that marital relationship and parental coalition as fundamental factors lead to consistency in child rearing, improve parent/adolescent relationships, and bring a better understanding between the two generations. This can help to reduce the gap between them. Parental authority among Iranians seemed to be weak. Iranian parents are advised to set patterns of roles and rules particularly in childhood that bring some obligations and responsibilities during adolescence. This study has implications for counselors. They are advised to focus on identity problem, intergenerational conflicts and gender role expectation. Counselors may lay more emphasis on family value (beliefs) than on behaviors. Special workshops and discussion groups on migration, bi-culturality, and adjustment should be conducted.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafa

ASIMILASI, GANGGUAN PSIKOLOGIKAL DAN KEFUNGSIAN KELUARGA DALAM KALANGAN KELUARGA PENDATANG IRAN DI MANCHESTER, ENGLAND

Oleh

MANDANA ALEMI

Oktober 2010

Penegerusi: Halimatun Halaliah Mokhtar, PhD

Faculti: Pengajian Pendidikan

Imigrasi ke negara lain yang berlainan budaya menimbulkan krisis imigrasi yang menyebabkan tekanan yang boleh memberi kesan negatif terhadap keluarga. Imigrasi bermakna keluarga berada dalam situasi yang baru di mana nilai, norma, pengalaman dan peranan menjadi persoalan dan ahli keluarga berkonflik antara satu sama lain. Bagi meneruskan kehidupan dalam situasi baru, keluarga boleh berusaha untuk hidup secara harmoni bersama masyarakat tempatan. Oleh sebab nilai dan sistem sosial berbeza, proses asimilasi adalah diperlukan. Berdasarkan masalah yang diutarakan, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti proses asimilasi, mengkaji gangguan psikologikal, serta meneroka pola kefungsiian keluarga pendatang Iran di Manchester, Britain.

Rekabentuk kajian ini adalah kombinasi kaedah kualitatif dan diskriptif yang berdasarkan temubual klinikal dan tinjauan. Kaedah persampelan adalah bertujuan (*purposive*) jenis *snowball*. Sampel kajian terdiri dari 30 keluarga pendatang dari Iran yang mempunyai anak remaja yang tinggal bersama-sama di Manchester, Britain.



Kesemua 30 keluarga bersetuju melibatkan diri dalam kajian ini secara sukarela. Tiga Petunjuk Asimilasi (Cochrane, 1993) digunakan untuk mengukur tahap asimilasi dan Soal Selidik Kesihatan (Goldberg & Hiller, 1979) digunakan untuk menilai gangguan psikologikal. Klinik Piawai Temubual Keluarga (Kinston & Loader, 1984) telah digunakan untuk mengenalpasti pola kefungsiian keluarga dan untuk membandingkan pola kefungsiian keluarga antara keluarga yang sihat dan keluarga yang menghadapi tekanan. Satu model bagi asimilasi dan pola kefungsiian keluarga dalam kalangan keluarga dan dalam setiap strategi asimilasi akhirnya dibentuk.

Analisis diskriptif menunjukkan bahawa anak perempuan lebih berasimilasi berbanding dengan ibu mereka. Wujud tahap asimilasi yang lebih tinggi dalam kalangan ahli keluarga yang sihat berbanding dengan ahli keluarga yang menghadapi tekanan, dan lebih tinggi gangguan psikosomatik dalam kalangan wanita berbanding dengan lelaki. Keluarga yang sihat menunjukkan kurang konflik, lebih kepaduan dan penyesuaian, komunikasi terbuka, lebih kepuasan terhadap hubungan perkahwinan dan terhadap hubungan ibu bapa-remaja, lebih fleksibiliti dari segi peranan keluarga, lebih perkongsian kuasa dan kekonsistenan ibu bapa memelihara anak, dan lebih keselarasan dengan persekitaran. Berdasarkan interaksi antara kefungsiian keluarga dan asimilasi, keluarga yang berasimilasi rendah menunjukkan lebih kepaduan, kekonsistenan ibu bapa memelihara anak, sikap keagamaan, hubungan dengan saudara mara dan masalah berkaitan dengan imigrasi berbanding dengan keluarga yang berasimilasi tinggi. Sebaliknya keluarga yang berasimilasi tinggi menunjukkan lebih fleksibiliti dari segi peranan keluarga, hubungan dengan masyarakat tempatan, dan keselarasan dengan nilai persekitaran.

Penelitian cara asimilasi dalam kalangan keluarga menghasilkan tiga model yang berbeza. Separuh dari keluarga pendatang memilih strategi Dwi-budaya sebagai tindak balas kepada masyarakat tempatan; manakala keluarga pendatang yang lain mengambil strategi pengasingan dan penyisihan. Pola kefungisian keluarga dalam setiap model dibentuk.

Kesimpulannya, kekuatan keluarga yang menjadi tonggak keluarga sihat dapat membantu keluarga pendatang menghadapi situasi kehidupan yang baru dengan jayanya. Dalam kajian ini ibu didapati semakin memperoleh lebih kuasa dalam kefungisian keluarga manakala kuasa bapa dalam membuat keputusan dan kawalan terhadap keluarga semakin berkurang. Hubungan perkahwinan dan persepakatan ibu bapa merupakan faktor asas bagi keselarasan memelihara anak, peningkatan hubungan baik ibu bapa/remaja, dan persefahaman yang lebih baik antara dua generasi. Ini dapat membantu mengurangkan jurang antara mereka. Kewibawaan ibu bapa dalam keluarga Iran dalam menjaga anak didapati agak lemah. Mereka dinasihati untuk menetapkan pola peranan dan peraturan khususnya bagi zaman kanak-kanak yang mampu mewujudkan obligasi dan tanggungjawab semasa zaman remaja. Kajian ini ada implikasi bagi kaunselor. Mereka dinasihati supaya memberi fokus kepada masalah identiti, konflik antara generasi dan harapan terhadap peranan lelaki/wanita. Kaunselor boleh memberi lebih penekanan kepada nilai keluarga (kepercayaan) berbanding dengan tingkah laku. Bengkel yang khusus dan perbincangan berkelompok mengenai migrasi, dwi-budaya, dan penyesuaian perlu dilaksanakan.



DEDICATION

To my family

My mother Eti Alemi

&

My husband Sohrab Kaviani

&

My children Sara, Sasha, Rozana Kaviani



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First of all, praise is to “**Allah**” the cherisher, and the sustainer of the world for giving me persistence, determination, health, money, and possibilities to complete this thesis. Then I would like to thank the authorities in the **Ministry of Education** in Malaysia for providing international students with a scientific, peaceful, and beautiful environment. Also many thanks in general to all **Malaysians** and in particular to **UPM** community for their kind hospitality and warm welcoming. They made me feel at my second home and never as a foreigner. I am honored to have studied and lived a part of my life with such civilized and kind people. Despite major differences in culture, each race is contributing positively to the variety and beauty in **Malaysia**; Malays with tolerance, grace, modesty, and ethics; Chinese with vitality and innovation, and Indians with colors in clothes and spices in foods! I will always look back and smile.

Definitely, completion of a PhD thesis is never accomplished through the efforts of one person. There are more people without whose involvement in the process, completion would not have been possible. Some by sharing their academic experience, providing guidance, some with helping me to maintain, in the midst of the academic and personal difficulties that I have had to face over the years of my journey. Others have contributed by demonstrating great patience and love.

My gratitude to the late Associate Professor Dr.**Lily Mastura Harun**, my previous supervisor, who supervised me for half of the duration of my study. She supported me in my most difficult times in the beginning. Always, all my prayers go to her. I am



also appreciative to my supervisor, distinguished **Dr. Halimatun Halaliah Mokhtar**, who guided the project from the time she took over until the completion of the thesis with thoughtful supervision. I sincerely thank her for being present whenever I needed her. Appreciation is extended to Associate Professor Dr. **Mohd. Sahandri Gani Hamzah**, my consultant statistician, for his expertise throughout the statistical work. I would like to give my thanks to **Dr. Maznah Baba**, my other committee member, for her invaluable advice, guiding me with her constructive comments. I am lucky that she finally found some time in her busy schedule, before submission of this thesis.

I would like to express my gratitude to **Dr. Siti Aishah Hassan** for her suggestions in my proposal presentation as she was the examiner. Later on, after final examination, she, as the chairman of examination committee, continued her contribution to this thesis. Her comments enriched the content of this work, and her understanding and knowledge caused me do the corrections in the best way within a short time. I am also grateful to my internal examiners Professor Dr. **Sharifah Mohd. Nor**, Associate Prof. Dr. **Sidek Mohd. Noah**, and external examiner Dr. **Jane A. Warren** for the time they spent on reading and for their constructive feedback. I perceive their contribution to this work as a privilege.

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The completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without help, assistance and support from all of these people.



APPROVAL

I certify that a thesis Examination Committee has met on 13 October 2010 to conduct the final examination of Mandana Alemi on her thesis entitled “Assimilation, Psychological Distress, and Family Functioning among Iranian Immigrant Families in Manchester, England” in accordance with the universities and university colleges Act 1971 and the constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

Members of the Thesis Examination Committee were as follows:

Siti Aishah binti Hassan, PhD

Lecturer
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairman)

Sidek b Mohd Noah, PhD

Associate Professor
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Internal Examiner)

Sharifah bt Mohd Nor, PhD

Professor
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Internal Examiner)

Jane Warren, PhD

Associate Professor
College of Educating
University of Wyoming
United States
(External Examiner)

SHAMSUDDIN SULAIMAN, PhD

Professor and Deputy Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date: 26 November 2010



This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**. The members of the supervisory Committee were as follows:

Halimatun Halaliah Mokhtar, PhD

Senior Lecturer
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairman)

Mohamed Sahandri Gani Hamzah, PhD

Associate Professor
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

Maznah Baba, PhD

Senior Lecturer
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

HASANAH MOHD GHAZALI, PhD

Professor and Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date: 26 November 2010



DECLARATION

A declare that the thesis is my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not currently, submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or at any other institution.

MANDANA ALEMI

Date:

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