ABSTRACT

OPERATIONALIZING FAMILY RELIGIOSITY: A PRACTICAL DEFINITION

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This paper focuses on the conceptualization of the term family religiosity. Family religiosity has been used as a variable in many social science surveys and reports, but it has never been formally operationalized. Using several families from the Southwestern Ohio area, 69 themes, 10 constructs, and 5 major dimensions of family religiosity were discovered using basic open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Information was gathered through grand-tour-approach-based, qualitative interviews and brief quantitative surveys. This paper also includes the limitations of the study and includes hypothetical, yet practical uses for the information presented.
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Dedication

To my parents and family who have supported me completely through this whole process. I could not be where I am today without your love, support, dedication to faith, and forging within me a desire to learn, grow, and be more the sum of my parts.
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Introduction

Research reveals that the majority of American homes ascribe to themselves religious values with only five to ten percent saying religion has no value in their lives (Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001). Interest in religiosity and families has increased because of its potential impact on many, if not all, aspects of daily living (Stefanek, McDonald, & Hess, 2005). Examples would include drug use and abuse, education, sexuality, marital accord and disharmony, and divorce all of which are of interest to social scientists (Price & Zaller, 1993). Religiosity in the Western world has come into sharp contrast to secularization, and thus has captured the interest of researchers (Mahoney et al.). Because religiosity affects individuals, it can be assumed that it affects families as well. Prior research indicates that family religiosity can be an important variable to consider when conducting studies with families (Stinnett, 1979). However, family religiosity has not been formally developed as a concept. This study endeavors to find a practical, operational definition for the concept of family religiosity.

The lack of a definition of family religiosity does not negate the research that has been done that incorporates it as a variable. However, it points to the need for a formal conceptualization and operational definition. The lack of a clear definition may be a consequence of looking at religiosity as an individual assessment of the degree to which an individual is religious or not and what effect this “religiousness” may have on his or her life.

It is theorized that the extent of religiosity, either on an individual or family level, affects family life. It helps family members deal with conflicts and stress as well as influence everyday living. Family religiosity can be considered a family strength (Stinnett, 1979; Stinnett & DeFrain, 1985). It can direct a family to how to deal with adversity and developmental challenges as well as how to organize daily life: who they choose as friends, how they view charity, the manner in which and how often they pray together or read holy texts, the frequency of attendance at holy services and how they participate, how children are socialized, and health care sought.

The need for the concept of family religiosity to be operationalized is paramount if researchers desire to use this variable in their investigations and determine to what extent the family is religious. This determination would allow investigations of questions such as does a family’s religiousness have an effect on drug use and abuse, sexual standards and expectations,
parenting and marital quality, expectations for careers, how stressors are perceived, and management strategies devised.

Background

Religiosity has long been a concept of interest in social science research (Mahoney et al., 2001). However, family religiosity has been largely ignored, presumably due to the difficulty in assessing the reality of family religiosity, something that belongs to the whole family, not just an individual.

Conceptualizing and measuring family religiosity should help researchers determine why and how families function. Current literature does not provide a clear example of measuring family religiosity. A starting point for the current research is that family religiosity is intersubjective and contains both an ideological and a behavioral component. The term family will be used to refer to two or more individuals in relationship with one another, residing in the same home, who share similar goals and values for the sake of the group (McKenry & Price, 2000). Religiosity in the individual can imply the degree to which one is religious, but a family is an entity that is greater than the sum of its parts and does not reflect only individual experience (Garland, 1999; White & Klein, 2002). Therefore, family religiosity must reflect a greater sense of the experience. Family religiosity is a group phenomenon that defines or characterizes the family as totum maius partibus, or the whole greater than the parts.

A comprehensive database keyword search through Google Scholar (http://scholar.google.com) revealed over 35,000 articles, theses, papers, and presentations in which the term religiosity is mentioned; a search for religion revealed close to 500,000. In comparison, a similar search for the term divorce offered 200,000 hits and parenting styles only 4,000. It is obvious that religion and religiosity are of great interest in the academic fields of Family Studies, Child Studies, Religious Studies, Psychology, and Sociology, as well as many others. A database keyword search for family religiosity yielded only 89 sources, 16 of which were published in academic research. In these articles, there are few attempts to operationalize family religiosity.

However, several subjects become known as to how family religiosity might be used in research. Sex, drugs and alcohol, education and social health, marriage, children, and divorce are among the major concepts in which family religiosity can be seen to have an effect (See Table A1).
Unfortunately, none of the studies that mention family religiosity sufficiently defines the term. In some studies, family religiosity is operationalized. However, these definitions are not adequate for use in the investigation of family religiosity due to the reliance on the assumption that family religiosity can be measured in the same way as individual religiosity. The frequency of church attendance or the importance placed on religion is not likely to be the only indicator of family religiosity; there has to be something more. In addition, prior research has tended to give the impression that family religiosity is something that an individual is able to report (Abraham & Kumar, 1999; Ball, Armistead, & Austin, 2003; Brook & Pahl, 2005; Mandara, Murray, & Bangi, 2003; Merrill, Salazar, & Gardner, 2001; Miller, Pasta, MacMurray, Chiu, & Comings, 1999; Özcan & Özcan, 2002; Sabbagh, Faher-Aladeen, & Resh, 2004; Thomsen & Rekve, 2003). A question arises, however, about the possibility of an individual being able to reflect the feelings, thoughts, and beliefs of a whole family. This does not seem to be the case as no one person can accurately represent more than him or herself (Garland, 1999; Olson, 1989).

It is easily concluded that although extant research is beneficial and has furthered their respective fields, it is not sufficient for capturing the entirety of the concept of family religiosity. The literature using family religiosity offers little guidance as to how to measure it. However, Glock and Stark (1965) conceptualized five dimensions of personal religiosity that measure the different ways that an individual shows his or her religiosity: experiential, ritualistic, ideological, intellectual, and consequential. These dimensions are considered timeless as each dimension is constant from one century to the next; and universal as every religion expects a person to hone each dimension in their personal growth (Glock & Stark). It is proposed that these same dimensions can be used to model interviews with families, allowing researchers to discover the practical definition of family religiosity.

Dimensions of Religiosity

The experiential dimension allows that all religions presume adherents will experience some sort of emotional revelation, that is, a “religious experience.” Families, for example, could experience this through a feeling of a “high” after spending time investigating their faith through after-dinner discussion.

The ritualistic dimension refers to what a person does in regards to her or his religious practice. Every religion expects that its believers will follow the exercises of the religion, be it worship, prayer, or the like. For families, this dimension is experienced in how the family
translates expectations of practice into the family’s expectations. For instance, some families require their members pray every day, attend service every week, or both, and some require little or no prayer and attend only on high holy days such as Christmas, Easter, Yom Kippur, or Rosh Hashanah.

The ideological dimension is the expectation that a person who claims membership in a religion also subscribes to its beliefs. The specifics of this dimension vary as religious beliefs differ; however, the expectation remains the same. This dimension should be more difficult to measure at the family system level. Individual family members may say they subscribe to a religion or hold certain ideological beliefs; considering totum maius partibus, it is important to consider the synergistic effect such ideological beliefs have on family functioning. Families likely do not have a personal record upon which they can compare their beliefs. There are books and treatises on each religion or denomination: the Bible (Christian), the Torah (Jewish), the Quran (Muslim), the Tanakh (Jewish), the Book of Confessions (Presbyterian), the Book of Concord (Lutheran), or the Articles of Religion (Methodist) for example. While systems theory would seem to suggest that families have an unspoken “covenant” between the members on what to think, on what not to discuss, and general family beliefs, it seems unlikely that many families organize these beliefs into a tangible record (Garland, 1999; White & Klein, 2002). However, through an interview process, a researcher could possibly obtain and generate such a document from the family.

The intellectual dimension incorporates not only the belief that a subscriber to the religion believes what the religion espouses, but that person will also seek to be informed constantly throughout life. For a family, this could include individuals coming together to read from holy texts at home or parents talking about religious ideas with their children.

Finally, the consequential dimension addresses how a religious subscriber relates to the material world. The four prior dimensions that were discussed deal with the relationship of a person to God or a higher power; that is, that growing in each dimension is ultimately profitable toward beliefs and the relationship to what it is a person worships. The consequential dimension is different in that it is the sum of the first four, though no more important; it allows the believer to know how to relate to other people, person to person. This dimension is the easiest to measure because it deals with the things that ought to be done as a consequence of following the other dimensions (Glock & Stark, 1965). Families should be able to quantify activities together or
treatment of other people as opposed to enumerating potentially abstract ideas. For instance, a family may find that because of their beliefs in their professed religion, they find themselves donating their time to volunteer in organizations that help the less fortunate.

In summary, family religiosity has not been sufficiently operationalized. It cannot be equated with individual religiosity because of the effect it has on every member of the family, not just the individual. And while family religiosity has been used in the investigation of various family life topics, it has not been fully investigated, which is likely because of the lack of a clear definition of the term. This study focuses on revealing a practical definition of family religiosity given by people who experience its effects in daily life. This will allow researchers to better understand the potential dimensions and ideas of family religiosity and incorporate the variable in research.

Method

Family religiosity is how a family experiences life through their metaphysical beliefs. Because family religiosity is something greater than just the individual beliefs of the members in a family, the concept of family religiosity must be investigated in the same way, going beyond the sum total of the individual beliefs. Investigating each individual family member’s religiosity, adding together or correlating the different ideas, and coming to a conclusion is looking at either their perception of their family religiosity or their own personal religiosity, not the family’s religiosity itself. In fact, Garland (1999) affirms using an approach that focuses on the whole family while elaborating on the family narrative saying that talking together and reliving experiences allows the family to engage in their “own shared history, remind [them] of moments of joy and sorrow, and communicate ‘We are family to one another’” (p. 213). Using this idea, it can be logically deduced that interviewing multiple family members together will allow them to use religiosity as a connection between members and reflect a greater principle of religiosity than belongs to the individual. As conceptualized here, research needs to investigate the perceptions of the family in totum maius partibus, focusing not just on metaphysical beliefs but also how there is a synergistic fusing of the family’s beliefs into guided action.

Design

The interview process for this study is derived from the grand tour approach. General questions were gleaned from the five dimensions of religiosity as laid out by Glock and Stark (1965) and used as a guide; however, the interviewees answered the questions to the best of their
ability and were allowed to deviate to any path they chose to explore as related to the idea of family religiosity. Data collection consisted of in-home tape-recorded and transcribed interviews with seven families of religious persuasion in order to attempt to achieve theoretical saturation (Olshansky, 2005; Pandit, 1996). A sample questionnaire used to guide the interview is located in Appendix B1. The questionnaire was asked of every family member capable of answering questions who was present in the household at the time the interview was given. Supplementary to the interview, a quantitative measure was given for each individual family member for a self-report of religiosity (Appendix B2). A “family-report” questionnaire was also given to the family with directions for them to reach a consensus as to what degree the family is religious (Appendix B3).

Sample

For this study, 16 people were interviewed in seven families (sample characteristics found in Table A2). The seven families, however, were composed of 28 members. This is important to note due to the inclusion of their ages into family quantitative data. All participants in the sample resided in Southwestern Ohio. Each marital dyad interviewed was composed of a man and a woman. Eight interviewees were male and eight female. The average age of participants was 41.88 (SD = 24.05). The average age for parents interviewed was 51.67 years (SD = 15.26) and the average age for children both interviewed and not present was 22.07 (SD = 14.27). Other relevant data is located in Table A3. All participants were identified as white. All participants were from families claiming to be religious; one family identified themselves as Catholic, with the other six families identifying themselves as Lutheran. There were no previous marriages or extra-marital children for any of the families interviewed.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling—families available to the researcher through the recommendation of area pastors. Informed consent (forms found in Appendix C) of all people interviewed was obtained. Because the purpose of this study was to focus on a practical definition of family religiosity, families were specifically chosen, after their recommendation, due to their involvement in religious life. Prior research indicates that the researcher may recruit subjects with a purpose in mind as opposed to sampling for representativeness (Morse, 1989; Sandelowski, 1995). Demographic sampling was employed, as to seek a homogeneous population (in this case, families who claim to be religious), and was
supplemented by phenomenal variation a priori to seek representative variation in responses to interview questions (Sandelowski).

**Data Analysis**

Basic grounded theory methods were used as the basis for data reduction and analysis (Sorrel & Redmond, 1995). To best utilize the interview process, extensive memos were taken during the interview. These notes were then, over the course of the interviews, constantly compared to one another as to draw out repetitive themes as well as single occurrences (Schumacher, Stewart, Archbold, Dodd, & Dibble, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Basic open coding, axial coding, and selective coding were employed to illustrate the concept of family religiosity and determine its dimensions (Strauss & Corbin). The sample interviewed was purposefully chosen as to strive to obtain the most relevant data to the topic at hand (Sandelowski, 1995). Due to this focused endeavor, a grounded theory was not developed, as the sample was insufficiently representative to substantiate the reality of the conclusions gathered (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

**Results**

**Themes and Constructs**

From the interviews, 69 themes were identified and then were classified into ten major constructs of family religiosity: family identity source, extrafamilial relationship expectations, experiential faith affect, family culture, family prayer expectations, religious feeling genesis, religious life ideas, family religious structure, familial frustration, and supernatural effect (see Table A3). The 69 themes are an amalgamation of each family’s interviews and should be considered as referring to the family’s beliefs and ideas, often as regards the family and occasionally as regards the individual family member. The constructs devised do not indicate that a family is or is not religious, but rather serve as concepts of family religiosity. These concepts can be most readily understood as general areas of ideological and behavioral components of family life (Glock & Stark, 1965). However, the ten constructs are only building blocks for family religiosity research. These constructs should also then serve as a general guide for future studies on and about family religiosity.

**Family identity source.** This construct primarily regards the characteristics from which a family identifies itself, especially in regards to religion. Where do religious ideas come from? How are differing beliefs within the family addressed? The majority of families identified that
when their children were in the home, or those whose children currently are in the home, the children seemed to have the same general religious or faith beliefs as the parents. In a few cases, when children believed differently from their parents, the issue was generally avoided or, through exposition, was not found to be as different as the children themselves believed. A recurring theme in each marital dyad was that though each person came from different backgrounds, be it different religions, classes, traditions, or experiences, the more years that went by, the more the dyad blended their religious beliefs to form a more synergistic belief. Ultimately, this led to a higher amount of sharing between the dyad and transferred to the rest of their family. Religious traditions and heritage were important to each member of the family, however each marital dyad also reported that there was a blending of traditions in the family, and a new phase within the heritage was begun as the family became more cohesive. In other words, the parents of each family saw themselves as combining traditions from their own families of origin.

Extrafamilial relationship expectations. In this construct, the family indicates how they want others to view them as well as what they do to meet that expectation. For instance, one family indicated that on Sundays, the family must not create too much outdoor noise, such as mowing the lawn or trimming hedges, out of respect for their neighbors. However, quieter activities such as washing the car or gardening were acceptable. This tied into the idea of living life to serve as an example of faith for others. Helping and respecting others were also recurring themes. This theme was mostly brought up in reference to service activities in which the family engaged or in which an individual from the family was expected to engage. It was also expected that the family and each family individual would seek out and make friends within their church family.

Experiential faith affect. This component focuses on the idea that the family will somehow experience their faith and expects each individual member to encounter their own faith. This is most often done through the church. The church introduces the religion, beliefs are formed from the encounter, religion guides how one views the experiences they have, and as a result, there is struggle throughout one’s life to shape and reform their beliefs. What a religious person goes through, however, is a series of times in which religious feelings and beliefs ebb and flow. Overriding the whole process is a significant desire to experience faith and a devotion to seeking it out.
Family culture. Ideas about how the family operates and interacts with each other are important, especially when investigating family religiosity. The family operates as a library for beliefs. While no one is the exact same as any other member, the family, in a sense, collects the individual’s beliefs and acknowledges the strengths and shortcomings as well as accepting the individual. The family also serves a critical role because the family’s structure serves as a natural catalyst for conversation about family matters and religious issues.

The family also places a high importance on meaningful ceremonies. One family referred to these events as “beginnings,” an appropriate title given the impact on the family. These events include: confirmations (a symbolic ritual in which the confirmand declares his or her intention to follow the teachings of the church), baptisms (where the person first “receives” the gifts of the Holy Spirit), weddings (a ceremony where the couple begins a new life together), adoptions and births (bringing a new member into the family), and even deaths and funerals (a time of mourning but also rejoicing that the deceased is beginning a new “phase” of life after physical existence). In this sense, the ceremony, which is a manifestation of the experiential dimension, reflects a belief in which the family recognizes that there is something that transcends the physical and moves into the supernatural.

In every family interviewed, there was a sense that the parents of the family would have a special sharing of faith between them, which is unlike the sharing of faith between the parents and the children. This is due to the synergistic effects and commingling of backgrounds and beliefs that are observed especially during the first years of a marriage. Most noticeably, this culminates in the desire to pass on the dyadic beliefs and values to their offspring, as well as regret and even shame at the lack or the scarcity of time spend in prayer, devotions, and reading from holy texts.

Family prayer expectations. Certainly, while a family may express regret at not engaging in prayer as often as they would like to or “know they should,” the religious family does engage in prayer. Prayers before meals occur most often, though not in times of haste, such as rushing out of the house for work in the morning or trying to get to children’s sporting events. Bedtime prayers are also often said, however, these occur mainly with younger children. As children age, parents expect that the child will engage in self-prayer. This expectation usually applies to each adult, as well. Each spouse believes and expects that the other is spending time in prayer for family issues as well as for the other spouse. Sporadic, or inconsistent, family prayer is not as
important, but can be expected in times of high stress, unexpected difficulties, or in thanks for a favorable outcome.

Religious feeling genesis. There are expectations within a family that religion will generate certain sentiments within its members. Religious couples may feel a strong desire to make sure their children are nurtured both in their life and in their “spiritual journey.” Part of this nurturance is that family members love not only each other, but others as well behave generously towards them. Giving time, resources, or of themselves are all “sacrifices” religious families expect of their members. More than these, however, is the idea that religion gives a “purpose” to the feelings and sentiments expressed within this construct. It is easy to theorize then that one may donate generously to the poor, but without the proper religious context, the action could be seen as meaningless. One family even pointed out that the general attitude of the person did not matter; the service did. One woman shared that her grandmother was not a nice person in life, but knew that helping those who were less fortunate was a major part of her belief system and so she gave to her church and to the people by cooking all the meals which the church gave.

Religious life ideals. This construct mainly identifies how religion guides one’s life, such as providing a moral compass or affording a high standard of ethics. However, religion in this context also gives believers a sense of freedom. This means that they feel confident in their beliefs, which provide a guideline for behavior, and thus, engage in action guided from that belief. This in turn reinforces the values they have, only strengthening the person for further action. They tend to do this not only for personal edification, but also so that they may live a life that “provides a witness” to an unbeliever who may observe the believer in action. One family expressed that they were glad to live among “unbelieving” neighbors, as the neighbors then could see that a Christian family does mess up and takes responsibility for their actions.

Family religious structure. To most religious families, reading from holy texts, most especially the Bible, is of extreme importance. Most religions encourage this reading as it encourages personal and familial growth and understanding. Attending services is also important. Most people interviewed view this as the most important aspect of “showing” your faith. More than one family pointed out that even those families who may not claim to be very religious but still have a spiritual background might expect their families to attend services on important holidays such as Christmas and Easter and offered examples of it happening in the
own churches. However, the norm for the interviewed religious families is to attend services at least weekly and participate. Usually, many held beliefs come from time spent in church services and the exposure to church doctrines and basics such as creeds. Churches, through this action, expect their members to learn and subscribe to the beliefs they espouse (Glock & Stark, 1965). However, many families encourage and expect members will spend time in personal meditation and study to advance their “relationship” with God and to form their own personal beliefs. All of this helps families to put their “faith into practice” or “live their faith.” One woman shared the following when reflecting on what she tried to pass on to her children:

We didn’t sit at the breakfast table and decide, “Are we going to church this morning?” it was a given. And I think when you pattern something for children from the time of earliest memories, “this is what we do,” they get it. Um, I can’t explain why some families have huge problems with their children. I don’t get that. I didn’t experience that. And I feel bad when I see that, for them, but our kids, um, had their friends there and we had friends there and most of the time as we moved from place to place, we find our friends when we worship. And, so, that creates more adhesion, I think, to your faith walk or it helps it. But, I, the church becomes for me, at least, an extension of what we did at home. At home, we were trying to raise a family that praised God in everything we did and how we trained the kids and what we sought as extracurricular activities outside the home seemed to mirror that. It just seemed like what we did.

**Familial frustration.** Although familial regret is situated into other categories, familial frustration is less ephemeral and transient. Feelings that are acknowledged and endure regarding what “should be” done reflect a stronger sense than regret. Religious families tend to feel they should spend more time in prayer, reading their holy texts, and talking with one another about religious matters. Though not sure how to fix the situation, people interviewed often reflected about the past, acknowledging that they seemed to have done more with their children when they were younger. The stresses and schedules of daily life, such as sports, after-school activities, and school itself, do not lend to extra time for religious study.

**Supernatural effect.** All families said the most important part of their faith is that there is something that transcends the present and the understandable. The importance of prayer does not lie just in the idea that it comforts the person praying but also in the belief that it made a difference and can continue to do so. People may pray for medical situations, safe travel, or over family stress, but there is more than going through the motions; people actually “see” a difference because of their prayer. People also see miracles, both the major and the daily. From the interviews, families described medical problems that disappeared overnight without
explanation, a canceled adoption was met with a new one, a daughter had no injuries after sliding across six lanes of ice-covered highway into opposing traffic; these families see these events as answers to their prayers by a supernatural influence, and more specifically, God. The principal function in this construct is that their beliefs will have eternal consequences; they will go to Heaven, some other family members may go to Hell. The hardest part of the interview for some families was reflecting on the fact that there are family members, either immediate or extended, that will go to Hell, while they believe they themselves will go to Heaven.

**Conceptualization of Family Religiosity**

In order to conceptualize family religiosity, the qualitative results of the interviews were synthesized with Glock and Stark’s (1965) five dimensions of individual religiosity as well as prior research articles that addressed family religiosity. Prior research indicated that family religiosity was the sum of frequency of attendance, the extent to which the family values religion, the subjective importance of religion in the home, and how religion is discussed in the home. The reality is these themes are important, but do not express the entirety of family religiosity.

As stated earlier, family religiosity is not a term that means every family member believes the same things. No one member of a family believes the same thing from day to day; faith, as it became evident in each interview, ebbs and flows, just as does the strength of belief. A family’s religiosity cannot necessarily be measured on a moving scale. Having family religiosity does not automatically mean that a family is a group of “Bible-thumping religious fanatics.” However, what family religiosity does refer to is a system of beliefs that helps the family identify who they are, what they do, what they believe, how to interact with each other and others outside the family, and their relationship with their god and their beliefs that transcend into what they believe their future holds.

During the course of the interviews, five major *definitional dimensions* of family religiosity emerged from the ten constructs: (a) family dogmatic transcendence, (b) life connections, (c) impassioned faithlife experiences, (d) ritualistic identity expectations, and (e) family education and edification. These dimensions, in fact, compose the essence of family religiosity. Therefore, family religiosity can be defined as a series of beliefs that have an effect on the family, the whole family, whether members espouse the same beliefs or not, that materialize within the realms of family dogmatic transcendence, life connections, impassioned...
faithlife experiences, ritualistic identity expectations, and family education and edification. To help understand these dimensions, examples from interviews are given below for each dimension.

*Family dogmatic transcendence.* The first dimension refers to the idea that families have a set of beliefs they say they subscribe to, but are not necessarily reflective of a church’s beliefs. These beliefs help to form who the family is and how they function. These beliefs are often expressed by one family member and confirmed by others around them. For instance, the matriarch of one family said:

> You know a perfect example was when [our daughter] was driving home and in that horrible accident. Do you remember that? She was driving home on [the highway] and hit that ice. When she called and told me that she was on her way home, I was literally lying on the bed upstairs and I was lying there praying for her. I knew the roads were icy. And I swear that was what kept her safe. Because she went down an embankment, up and crossed the other side. It was a very busy highway. And I feel like there are angels out there, I just think prayer can do so much that way. As far as the whole family being involved… that’s me; that’s a personal thing.

As she told the story, the patriarch was nodding his head and giving verbal affirmation of the story and of the belief. He also reflected the beliefs as being present in himself, the importance of them to the matriarch, and his support of her in those beliefs. During the course of the interview, they both also expressed their hope that their children also believed the same things.

*Life connections.* This second dimension specifically refers to how a family makes connections with those around them. It also reflects how a family views material things. One family expressed how sometimes their family’s religiosity is demonstrated in their daughter’s desire to help the homeless. When they go downtown, she always makes them bring food coupons to hand out to the homeless they encounter. That way, the homeless are assured a free meal, but the choice to spend money on something else, possibly detrimental to their situation, is taken away. They feel they are doing good for the people around them. Many families also reflected on the idea that what they do in and around their home reveals to their neighbors a “good way of living” or a “living faith.”

*Impassioned faithlife experiences.* Family religiosity tends to inform a family’s members how they should feel during and after experiences. The third dimension leads to this information. These experiences can range from services one attends to crises of faith, from
conventions and meetings to discussions about beliefs. One family identified a time they had struggled with their faith and what they observed in another family during this time:

I think of our friend, who we had, uh, witnessed to is a good Calvinistic term, and uh, um, prayed for, for a long time that he would find his faith. And it was a mountain top experience—that he was swimming in an ocean with a coworker of his and the coworker started to struggle and [our friend] had a hold of this individual and attempted to save him and he slipped away. And [the wife of the individual who drowned] was a tremendous Christian and was so calm about the event and just knew full well that he was now in eternity, that they [the couple being witnessed to] just had to explore it further and gave her tremendous peace of mind. That was their mountaintop, both [our friend and his wife], their mountaintop experience. It kind of tipped them over.

It gave the family interviewed joy to finally see their friends “accept” a living faith. The person who was converted from this experience then went on to live a very active life in the church and became a skilled apologist for his faith.

Ritualistic identity expectations. The fourth dimension helps families identify what is expected in actual service to their faith. Does a family participate in ushering and collecting the offering during a religious service? Do they pray together at meals and bedtimes? Are they doing enough? From where do these expectations come? One participant said the following when asked about what was expected in church:

…I think I really started participating, like going through the hymns, bulletins, and stuff probably when I was ten, eleven or something like that. Then I started acolyting, and now I usher. Its just sort of progressing, it’s not really forced upon… it wasn’t really forced upon me.

One should note that even though families have expectations for their family members, they might not be same for each member. In addition, it is unlikely that each of those expectations is met all the time. In fact, not being able to meet the expectations they laid forth for their family is often a source of frustration and regret; they want to do things better and stick to schedules more, but are unable to do so due to extrafamilial conflicts. For instance, prayer often came up as one of those things families wanted to do better, to do more of, and often failed at both:

I mean it was like, “We need to be better about this,” and then we would gear up and do it again, and then… Or then everybody was gone in a different direction, and then, then we’d get out of the pattern, and then we’d always try do it again. So, probably if you asked our kids, they’d say, “We did that sometimes,” but the devotion thing would be on and off. Um… The scheduling, the going to ball practice, or going to my part-time job, “I’m not going to be here for dinner, so we’re not going to do it then.” And when will we do it if we don’t do it after mealtime, and, uh, I don’t know.
Family education and edification. The last identified dimension helps to give the family an idea of what is expected of them in terms of learning and growth. This means not only learning more about their family’s faith, but also learning about one another. This helps the family becomes strengthened together while providing a moral direction for the family. This is not some static direction, but one that is able to shift and move. However, most families would agree any direction they go in is fine as long as the family is focused on God:

I think it’s changed a lot since we’ve been married. I think it’s actually blossomed and bloomed into what it is now. I feel like we have grown in maturity in our faith so much more since we first got married. When we got married, we both agreed that Christ was going to be our foundation, that our marriage was going to be a Christ-centered marriage. And we would make sure our children would be raised as Christians. But I think it is fluid, and when it is fluid, it just makes it so much easier.

This dimension also allows the family to focus their energy for learning into what is important to them, such as Biblical texts, meditation, study, and service attendance.

To reiterate, these dimensions should not be seen as something to measure along a guided model, such as a Likert scale. However, these dimensions can be used to better expound upon questions that investigate family religiosity. For instance, questions derived from prior research guided the interviews conducted. One such question was “Does your family have regular conversations about religion and beliefs?” While the question may be valid, it may be better understood and stated if we rewrite it through the lens of the Family Education and Edification dimension. It may instead be worded “Does your family engage in conversations that allow the family to be strengthened? What effect do these conversations have on family functioning?” While the substance of the question has not changed considerably, the researcher can enter into the interview more focused on his or her purpose and prepared for what might occur.

Discussion

While there has been increased interest in research since the 1970s regarding religiosity, family religiosity has been studied very little as a formal concept (Stefanek et al., 2005; Stinnett, 1979). However, the lack of a definition did not prohibit researchers from viewing family religiosity as a possibly important variable in studies involving drug use and abuse, education, sexuality, marital unity and disharmony, as well as divorce (Price & Zaller, 1993). Lacking a definition, researchers also lacked a focus and an understanding of how important family religiosity could be as a factor in their respective studies. Family religiosity has also been
difficult to study due to the idea that family religiosity must reflect a greater phenomenon than just an individual’s perception; it must be consider in *totum maius partibus*.

It can be easily argued that some families exhibit their religiosity more than others do. During the course of the interviews, it became evident that some families use their religiosity as a guide for their general behavior, but see it as only one of many influences in their lives; others use it as a worldview to organize their thought processes, behavior, and beliefs. The reality is that some families are more able or willing to incorporate religion into their lives. This may be due to influences that can be seen using the dimensions of family religiosity. For instance, a family with a longer, more involved familial history with religion, who has struggled with defining their faith, and who believes they see more miracles in daily life may be more likely to incorporate their religiosity into their family life. This family may be compared to a family whose familial history with religion is much less involved and has not seen any tangible result of their faith. The latter family may be less likely to report that they have a high family religiosity. However, more research needs to be done in this area in order to draw any substantial conclusions.

While finding a definition for family religiosity is essential for future research in the field of family science, it should be made clear that there is no judgmental value being assigned in this study. A family with a higher self-report of family religiosity is not “better” than a family with a lower self-report. In this sense, there is never a “better”; though the family’s self-report may serve as an indication as to how well the family is able to incorporate their religiosity into their family life. In addition, the self-report only reflects the current phase the family believes they are going through; it only serves as a still photograph rather than a video captured image (Olshansky, 2005; Pandit, 1996). Therefore, a family may actually have a higher family religiosity over a long-term period, but it may not be reported in a survey instrument during the interview process. Interestingly, the quantitative data gathered was not consistent (as reported in Table A2). Some families reported higher family religiosity than the average of the individual reports; some did not. This discovery may be due to the self-report being given to the members and the families after the interview was completed. Some family members may have been feeling “good” about how the interview went and marked themselves higher on the scale; others may have felt the interview, particularly their contribution, went poorly and marked themselves lower. It did seem that families with children in the home reported the family religiosity as being
lower than the parent’s individual scores of religiosity. It also seemed that older families or those with children out of the home reported their family religiosity as higher than the individual scores, though there was not enough data gathered to empirically support either supposition.

In reality, family professionals, such as counselors, therapists, and church workers, may make such diagnoses of how well a family integrates religiosity into their life together. Their diagnosis, or value judgment, should be made to the individual family. Using the data from this study, as well as studies that may follow, these family professionals may gather data on families under their care. This data may then allow them to help families by giving them the tools they need to effectuate positive relationships and communication and integrate religiosity into their daily lives. However, interviewing the families themselves may also help to provide the family with new ways of thinking. One of the families specifically expressed that sitting through the interview and answering questions allowed them to think about issues that they had not thought about previously as well as obtain the views of their family members. They were excited to use the information further in the future.

This research identifies five dimensions of family religiosity, which significantly adds to the realm of academic literature. Glock and Stark’s (1965) dimensions of religiosity still hold significance for the individual and the family, but have been supplemented by the new familial dimensions. The whole concept of religiosity has been validated, but especially in regards to the family, by the findings presented in this study. Because it can be shown that religiosity is present in and meaningful to the family, it allows that religiosity can be measured and has a definition. Thus, family religiosity can and should be used as a variable in future studies. Using this research, a researcher might now be able to develop a better set of questions to identify dimensions of family religiosity. For example, a researcher might ask a family after ascertaining the rituals and traditions the family engages in, “How do the rituals and traditions help identify your family? Does it help your family feel a sense of unity? Does it set you apart from other families? Does it allow you to share experiences with other families?”

This study went further on a definition of family religiosity than any study previously done; we have moved past a simple definition that shows family religiosity somehow equaling the family going to church and praying together. Instead, we now have a conceptual definition that allows researchers to see families as more than just a single system of beliefs or actions. These systems then fall in the realms of family dogmatic transcendence, life connections,
impassioned faithlife experiences, ritualistic identity expectations, and family education and edification. The study’s purpose was not to help families work out their family’s religiosity on their own, but rather to find a practical, conceptual definition of family religiosity that enables researchers to investigate family religiosity and its importance on all aspects of family life. The researcher hopes that further research is able to identify an operational definition based on the careful conceptualization of the dimensions discovered in this paper.

While this study of family religiosity is important for further academic research, it also had several limitations. The first limitation is that the study mainly focused on members of a small conservative Christian denomination and therefore the results may not represent the entirety of all Christians nor of all religious people as it currently excludes peoples of other faiths. It is also possible that other researchers, through their own interviews, will come to different conclusions, creating new and different constructs and dimensions, rather than the ones presented here. However, this author expects similar results in future studies. In addition, as not every member of each family was present for the interview, the whole of the family’s religiosity may not be expressed. However, each family in which members were not present expressed that the person or persons absent had beliefs that both coincided and deviated from the beliefs of the family members present. This does not completely resolve the issue, however (Garland, 1999; Olson, 1989). Further studies on family religiosity should help to alleviate the limitations encountered in this study and expand the reliability and validity. Therefore, while deferring to the limitations of this study, it is clear that the data gathered is the first step towards understanding a field in which there is growing interest, but not much research.
References


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<th>Subject of investigation</th>
<th>Operationalization of family religiosity</th>
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<td>Abraham &amp; Kumar</td>
<td>1999</td>
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<td>Correlation between sexual practices in India among young people and higher rates of STDs and pregnancy</td>
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<td>Ball, Armistead, &amp; Austin</td>
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<td>Religiosity’s association with adjustment outcomes in sexual behavior, self-esteem, and psychological functioning in African-American female adolescents</td>
<td>None; adolescent report; religiosity operationalized as high church attendance, valuing religion, and relying on religion as coping source</td>
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<td>Brook &amp; Pahl</td>
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<td>Protective role of ethnic racial identity against drug use among African American young adults</td>
<td>Adolescent report on family church attendance as indicator of FR</td>
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<td>Griffin-Carlson &amp; Schwanenflugel</td>
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<td>Relationship between family characteristics and how involved a parent becomes after being notified of their adolescent child’s decision to have an abortion</td>
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<td>Gunnoe, Hetherington, &amp; Reiss</td>
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<td>Hasnain, Sinacore, Mensah, &amp; Levy</td>
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<td>Mandara, Murray, &amp; Bangi</td>
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<td>Identify factors that may lead to African American adolescents having sex</td>
<td>Parental report of importance of religion in home, importance of physical place of worship, frequency of attendance</td>
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<td>Merrill, Salazar, &amp; Gardner</td>
<td>2001</td>
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<td>How drug use in youths is affected by family religiosity</td>
<td>Student report on family: frequency and longevity of church service attendance, parental views of religion, parental responsibilities in church, having and frequency of family discussions of religion, debates on religion between parents and children</td>
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<td>Miller</td>
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<td>Investigating background and consequences as they relate to childbearing motivations</td>
<td>Importance of religion to mother, father, and family life</td>
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<td>Miller, Pasta, MacMurray, Chiu, &amp; Comings</td>
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<td>Özcan &amp; Özcan</td>
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<td>What factors may be linked to youths in Turkey choosing to smoke</td>
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<td>Sabbagh, Faher-Aladeen, &amp; Resh</td>
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<td>Shani, Ayalon, Abu Hammad, &amp; Sikron</td>
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<td>The efficacy of the presentations of a burn-prevention program directed towards Bedouin children in Israel</td>
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<td>Thomsen &amp; Rekve</td>
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### Table A2

*Quantitative Interview Data by Family Groups*

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<td>Score of Family Religiosity</td>
<td>Age</td>
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KEY:
A, B, etc.–Interview Series; 2, 3, etc.–Number of participants in family; L–Lutheran; C–Catholic; COH–Children out of home; CIH–Children in home; BC–Boomerang Child(ren); P–Patriarch; M–Matriarch; C1, etc.–1st child; OH–Out of home; IH–In home; NR–No response
Table A3

*Mean, Modality, and Standard Deviations of Samples*

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<tr>
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<td>Standard Deviation of Age of Participants</td>
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Table A4

Constructs and Developed Themes of Family Religiosity

Family identity source
1. Functions as a collective.
2. Bases their identity on traditions.
3. Has a heritage.
4. Dyad begins by blending held beliefs.
5. Religion grounds the family.

Extrafamilial relationship expectations
1. Respect for others.
2. Help others.
3. Consider how others view family.
4. Form friendships within church family.
5. Perform volunteer services for others.
6. How to live lives as example.

Experiential faith affect
1. Religion as driving force.
2. Interest and participation ebbs and flows.
3. Religion has influence on how to live life.
4. Must have experiences within church.
5. Members must experience their own faith walk.
6. Faith is fluid and changes.
7. Faith grows.
8. Struggle with faith.
9. Sense of devotion to faith.
10. Desire to experience faith.

Family culture
1. Family is a collection of personal beliefs and ideas.
2. Expects members to participate in family activities.
3. Regret lack of time and dedication spent in prayer, devotions, and reading holy texts and wish for more.
4. Accept every family member.
5. Invoke a sense of discipline.
6. Participate in “beginnings”—weddings, baptisms, confirmations, adoptions, etc.
7. Respect for family members.
8. Conversation on family matters.
9. Natural conversation on religious matters.
10. Religious services and teachings provide opportunity for discussion.
11. Dyadic sharing.
12. Desire to pass beliefs to children.
Family prayer expectations
1. Meal prayers.
2. Bedtime prayers.
3. Personal prayer.
4. Sporadic prayer.

Religious feeling genesis
1. Nurturance of children.
2. Love others.
3. Be generous towards others.
4. Be kind to others.
5. Religion gives purpose to feelings.

Religious life ideals
1. Freedom of action and belief.
3. High standard of ethics.
4. Creates strong values.
5. Aids beliefs.
7. Provides guideline for life.
8. Witness to others through life.

Family religious structure
1. Holy texts important.
2. Church (congregation) very important.
5. Time in meditation.
6. Time in study.
7. Participate in services.
8. Attend services
9. Participate in church activities outside services.
10. Subscribe to church beliefs.

Familial frustration
1. Should spend more time in prayer.
2. Should spend more time reading.
3. Should spend more time talking.
4. More done when children were younger.
5. Current scheduling with children (activities, sports, school, etc.) does not allow for as much time spent in prayer, reading, and talking as desired.
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<td>2. Supernatural influences.</td>
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<td>3. See miracles.</td>
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<td>4. Eternal consequences.</td>
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Appendix B1

*Family Questionnaire*

1. What does religion mean to you?

2. What does family religiosity mean to you?

3. Has your family ever shared any “religious experiences”?

4. Does your family attend services together? Is there a certain amount of time your family spends together at services? Are there any family activities your family does through your religious congregation?

5. Does your family participate in time spent in prayer at home? Is it expected or is it just something that is done?

6. Does your family have a statement of beliefs? Is this statement a personal or family value or can it be found in the writings of your religious system? Does every family member subscribe to the same beliefs?

7. Does your family have regular conversations about religion and beliefs?

8. Does your family spend time reading your religion’s holy book?

9. How does your family’s religion affect others? Does your family participate in volunteer activities or the like because of these beliefs?
Appendix B2

*Individual Questionnaire*

1. How religious are you on a scale of 1-10.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Appendix B3 *Family Questionnaire*

1. How religious is your family on a scale of 1-10?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
Appendix C1

_Informed Consent Form Over 18_

Dear ____________________________:  

My name is Lewis Polzin. I am currently a graduate student completing my master’s thesis at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio.

You are invited to participate in a study attempting to find how families experience religion. I will ask you to interview with me regarding your family’s religiosity. Your participation in the study will be confidential and will not be labeled or stored with any identifying markers that may be used to discover your or your family’s identity. However, direct quotes using pseudonyms may be used in the thesis. At any point during the interview, you may choose not to respond to any question that may make you uncomfortable. You may also withdraw your participation from the interview at any time. You will not be asked to speak about anything that goes beyond the stresses of everyday life.

If you have any further questions about this study, please contact me at (513) 543-9027 or polzinlr@muohio.edu. You may also contact my advisor and supervisor, Charles Hennon, at (513) 529-2323 or hennoncb@muohio.edu. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please call the Office of Advancement of Research and Scholarship at (513) 529-3734 or humansubjects@muohio.edu.

Thank you for your participation. I am very grateful for your help and hope that this will be an interesting time for you. Please keep this top portion of the page.

***************************************************************

I agree to participate in the study on family religiosity. I understand my participation is voluntary and that my name will not be associated with my responses. I also understand I may withdraw my participation at any time during the study.

Participant’s signature_____________________________________
Date________________________
Appendix C2

Informed Consent Form Under 18

Dear _____________________________:

My name is Lewis Polzin. I am currently a graduate student completing my master’s thesis at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio.

You are invited to participate in a study attempting to find how families experience religion. I will ask you to interview with me regarding your family’s religiosity. Your participation in the study will be confidential and will not be labeled or stored with any identifying markers that may be used to discover your or your family’s identity. However, direct quotes using pseudonyms may be used in the thesis. At any point during the interview, you may choose not to respond to any question that may make you uncomfortable. You may also withdraw your participation from the interview at any time. You will not be asked to speak about anything that goes beyond the stresses of everyday life.

If you have any further questions about this study, please contact me at (513) 543-9027 or polzinlr@muohio.edu. You may also contact my advisor and supervisor, Charles Hennon, at (513) 529-2323 or hennoncb@muohio.edu. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please call the Office of Advancement of Research and Scholarship at (513) 529-3734 or humansubjects@muohio.edu.

Thank you for your participation. I am very grateful for your help and hope that this will be an interesting time for you. Please keep this top portion of the page.

********************************************************************************

I give my permission for my child to participate in the study on family religiosity. I understand my child’s participation is voluntary and that their name will not be associated with their responses. I also understand my child may withdraw or I may withdraw my child at any time during the study.

Parent’s signature_____________________________________
Child’s assent_____________________________________
Date______________________________________________
IRB Proposal

1. Purpose. This research focuses on finding a definition of family religiosity. It will help add to the field of family studies by operationalizing the term “family religiosity” so that it may be used in further research. The research being done will be emic in nature, using a grounded theory approach, trying to conceptualize the idea of family religiosity through the investigation of the family system. The expected outcome is that each family investigated will relay information (themes) to the researcher that will be similar to other families. These themes may then be used to identify the dimensions of family religiosity that exist in a practical sense.

2. Subject Population. I would anticipate the number of families investigated, in order to reach theoretical saturation, will be between seven and 12. The age ranges of participants may range from 10-60. Most families will be composed of a male-female marital dyad and may include children who live at home, children in the vicinity of home or at college, or families may have children who have left the home (these adult children will likely not be available for inclusion in the study). Due to the nature of the study, it is assumed that each family is religious. These families are also likely to be in good mental and physical health.

3. Recruitment and Selection of Subjects. Participants will be recruited through asking area pastors to ask families in their congregations if they will be willing to participate in the study. This helps to ensure that the sample is randomized to a certain extent and provide some insurance that personal bias is minimized. This sample is also not chosen so that the results can be generalized, but rather serve as the basis for operationalizing a variable for further investigations that may be generalized in the future.

4. Potential Risks and Discomforts. Parents and children may feel uncomfortable in discussing their beliefs about religiosity in front of each other. There may be aspects of the conversation in which parents or children could use information inappropriately in the future. There also may be feelings of guilt or shame if there is disagreement among family members. There may be family discord in light of shared information, but this should not exceed normal family communication on a daily basis. If help is needed, each family will be advised to conference with their local or congregational clergy member.

5. Potential Benefits. Family may feel more cohesive when all family members are able to share their opinion in an environment that includes the researcher. Both parents and children will be more aware of the other’s feelings and beliefs. The family may learn more about each other, member’s desires, and may learn to plan activities based on information expressed in the interview. This also benefits further research in the area by more fully expressing the idea of family religiosity and allows it to be used effectively in that research.

6. Informed Consent. Each family member will be read the Informed Consent letter (found in Appendix C) and asked to sign his or her individual letter. For those under the age of 18, a parent will be asked to sign the Informed Consent letter and each child will be asked to indicate their assent.
7. Exempt Status Request. Not applicable.


   a. The subjects of this study will be engaged in verbal interviews guided, though not limited, by the researcher’s questionnaire. They will also be asked to fill out an individual questionnaire of their religiosity and a family questionnaire regarding the family’s religiosity.

   b. The data will be gathered through verbal interviews in each family’s home and will be tape-recorded and transcribed. The written answers to the questionnaire will be collected and incorporated into the study.

   c. The length of time involved for the interview and questionnaire should be no more than one and a half hours and will only consist of one interview with those family members present.

   d. I will be individually collecting the data. My experience and education qualifies me for this collection.

   e. There is no compensation for participation in this study.

9. Research Location. Each interview will be conducted in the home of each individual family. If the home is not available, private accommodations will be requested at the congregation to which the family belongs.

10. Procedures for Safeguarding Confidentiality of information. This study’s information is confidential. Each interview will be tape-recorded and labeled with a numbered marker in such a way that only the researcher will understand its meaning. Each questionnaire handed back will coincide with the number on the tape. Each tape will then be transcribed then destroyed when the study is concluded. Each questionnaire will be recorded then destroyed when the study is concluded. Each transcript will be saved in a confidential container and in a safe area for further investigation with no identifying markers or indicators to expose any person’s participation. Any information extraneous to the subject being studied will not be included in the study and will be destroyed.

11. Deception. There will not be any deception.