

FIT Science, Habits and Family Functioning

In the FIT Report “FIT Science and Family Functioning” we reported a study that showed higher levels of FITness was associated with more healthy family functioning. It was proposed that personal FIT factors might play an important role in how people deal with the life events that impact family health and well-being.

This FIT Report looks at the relationship between FITness and family functioning in greater detail. It focuses on the relation between FIT Science variables and the different kinds of habits that are ubiquitous in ordinary family life and how these impact family functioning. We hypothesise that poor family functioning is partly a result of people habitually behaving in negative ways instead of responding appropriately to the needs of the situation. FIT people do what is needed, not what is habitual. We are investigating how Inner and Outer FIT factors might determine how habitual a person is, which in turn may impact on how well a family functions.

Participants

110 adults (79 females, 31 males) took part in this study. The most common age category of participants was 18-21, followed by 22-30, 41-50, and 31-40. The majority of participants classified themselves as White British (59.1%) and Indian (19.1%), with the other 14 ethnic categories accounting for 21.7% of participants. Most were the first or second born amongst their siblings (76.3%). They were recruited in a variety of ways, but some participants also volunteered themselves through an advertisement placed on the National Autistic Society’s research web page.

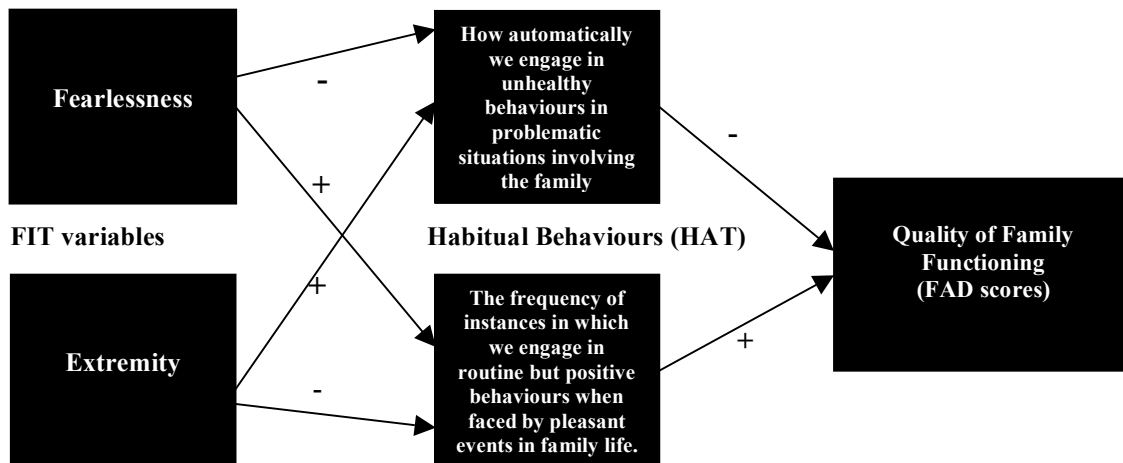
Procedure

Each person completed *The FIT Profiler*, and the *Family Assessment Device (FAD)* which measures family functioning and how good it is. Each person also completed a *Habit Assessment Tool (HAT)* where they rated their habitual behaviours in 12 different areas of family functioning. The HAT involved rating how *frequently* the behaviour in question was for them in the family and how *automatic* its occurrence was.

Outcomes

The main purpose of this FIT Report is to model the relationship that exists between FIT measures, habitual behaviours, and family functioning. To do this we used a powerful modelling tool – called Structural Equations Modelling – to outline the best model to help understand why some families function well and others experience problems. Figure 1 highlights the main findings of the present study. This Figure shows that the FIT variables (in this case, Fearlessness and Behavioural Extremity – the opposite of Behavioural Flexibility) do indeed predict both the frequency and automaticity of habits. These habits are in turn related to positive/negative outcomes for family units. We propose that FIT partly determines how habitual people are in their behaviours and that this in turn plays a significant role in how well the family functions. Specifically, Figure 1 shows that Fearlessness and Behavioural Extremity determine unhealthy and automatic responses in problematic situations involving the family, and that this, coupled with the number of frequently occurring healthy habits, determines how functional individuals report their family life to be.

Figure 1: Structural Equations Model of Family Functioning (n=110).



If there is an arrow between boxes, those relationships are statistically significantly related, with the sign indicating whether it is positive or negative.

Conclusions

This FIT Report has developed our understanding of how FIT factors might play a role in family life. Both Inner FIT (Fearlessness) and Outer FIT (Behavioural Extremity) variables together influence the presence of particular types of habitual

responding in families. These habitual responses were in turn shown to determine, in part, how functional family life was seen as being. In this context, it may be that reducing Extremity scores (through FIT Behavioural Flexibility training) could serve to reduce the likelihood of people habitually doing negative things that affect the family. There is a need also to promote greater Fearlessness. Professor Fletcher has suggested that this too is best achieved through promoting more flexible behaviours since that is one way people can learn that their fears are often not justified.

To function well, a family needs to be continually on the lookout for bad habits, and to replace these with alternative ways of behaving. This makes family life more enjoyable as well as more positive and functional. When families are more able to realise the habits that make and break how they function, and when family members can actively explore more flexible ways of dealing with them, people will feel happier and more confident in dealing with day-to-day-life. Society may well develop as a consequence too. That FIT Science may be able to play a positive role in this process is exciting.