

Measuring Empowerment in Families Whose Children Have Emotional Disabilities: A Brief Questionnaire

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ABSTRACT: This paper describes the development and empirical examination of a brief questionnaire for assessing empowerment in families whose children have emotional disabilities. The questionnaire is based on a two-dimensional conceptual framework of empowerment derived from the literature. One dimension reflects empowerment with respect to the family, service system, and larger community and political environment; the other dimension reflects the expression of empowerment as attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors. The paper outlines the questionnaire's conceptual basis, describes its development, and presents analyses of reliability and validity based on 440 responses of family members. Applications of the instrument in both research and service delivery are discussed.

Family empowerment is increasingly seen as a central goal of efforts to improve services for families whose children have disabilities. The emergence of this concept reflects recent developments in the consumer, practice, and research communities. Among these developments are the growth of the consumer movement with its emphasis on self-help and self-reliance (Moxley, Raider, & Cohen, 1989), the widespread application of practice models that focus on family strengths rather than deficits (Cochran, 1987; Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1988; Poertner & Ronnau, 1992), the explicit incorporation of empowerment values within public policies and programs (Gallagher, Trohanis, & Clifford, 1989; Stroul & Friedman, 1988), and the increasing recognition that services can be delivered in ways that either promote or inhibit self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1982; Dunst & Paget, 1991; Dunst & Trivette, 1987). The concept of family empowerment has also benefited from the synergistic effect that comes from many different disciplines focusing on one idea at the same time. Virtually all the helping professions that serve families of children with disabilities have adopted this concept to some degree, and thus it is beginning to emerge as a common value across disciplines.

Although empowerment has broad appeal as a general concept, it has proven to be somewhat elusive as a research construct. Much recent discussion has been directed toward defining and delineating its general dimensions (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Parsons, 1991; Simon, 1990; Staples, 1990) and its specific applicability to children and families (Dunst & Paget, 1991; Dunst & Trivette, 1987; Hegar, 1989). Empowerment has been variously described as both a process and a state, as both an individual and collective characteristic, as an attitude, perception, ability, knowledge and action, and as a phenomenon that can be manifested in a range of circumstances and environments. At present, the literature is beginning to show some general consensus on broad definitions of empowerment; however, there is little agreement about what specific dimensions or aspects distinguish it from other constructs.

Perhaps because of this ambiguity, attempts to measure empowerment have lagged far behind discussions of its importance. With the exception of measures that address some aspects of family empowerment, such as strengths (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1988), no scales have been developed to provide a general picture of family members' empowerment. The need for such measures is especially important in view of the increasing number of service delivery models that feature empowerment as a major goal (Friesen & Koroloff, 1992). Efforts to evaluate such programs lack suitable measures with which to gauge success and often must rely on measures that are based on more traditional views of family functioning.

In this paper we describe the development and empirical examination of a 34-item scale, the Family Empowerment Scale (FES), designed to assess empowerment in parents and other family caretakers whose children have emotional disabilities. The impetus of the scale's development was the need for a brief, self-administered measure that could provide a "snapshot" view of empowerment at one point in time. Item content was based on a conceptual framework consisting of two key dimensions: the level of empowerment and the way it is expressed. In the following discussion, we present this framework and its derivation from the literature, discuss the process of scale development, including the use of parent focus groups, and report on the scale's reliability and validity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the last 15 years numerous authors have offered definitions of empowerment. The major themes of these definitions include: the reduction of powerlessness (Solomon, 1976); gaining, developing, seizing, enabling or giving power (Staples, 1990); the ability to influence people, organizations, and the environment affecting one's life (Cochran, 1987; Hasenfeld, 1987; Vanderslice, 1984); attaining control over one's life and democratic participation in the life of one's community (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977; Katz, 1984; Rappaport, 1981; Rappaport, Swift, & Hess, 1984; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). These definitions encompass both a process as well as a state of empowerment

(Gutierrez & Ortega, 1991; Parsons, 1991) and describe both an individual and group phenomenon (Staples, 1990).

Gutierrez and Ortega (1991) and Dodd and Gutierrez (1990) discuss three levels of empowerment. According to Gutierrez and Ortega (1991), the *personal level* is concerned with the individual's "feelings of personal power and self-efficacy" (p.24); the *interpersonal level* is concerned with an individual's ability to influence others; and *political empowerment* is concerned with "social action and social change ... with the additional goal being the transfer of power between groups in society" (p. 25). Solomon's (1976) three sources of powerlessness reflect similar levels. Solomon describes *negative self evaluations* which are the attitudes of oppressed people; *negative experiences* in the interaction between the victims of oppression and the outside systems which impinge upon them; and the *larger environmental systems* which consistently block and deny effective action by powerless groups. In discussing levels at which advocacy occurs, Friesen (1989) also suggests a framework that involves the case, the service, and the community/political levels. Caspary (1980) notes that a personal sense of powerlessness may be one of the major obstacles to political involvement, implying that personal empowerment precedes political empowerment. These two latter authors suggest that there may be a developmental sequence from a case or personal focus to action involving larger systems.

In addition to levels of empowerment, another dimension reflected in the literature is the way in which empowerment is expressed. Staples (1990) asserts that, "In addition to transformations in consciousness, beliefs, and attitudes, empowerment requires practical knowledge, solid information, real competencies, concrete skills, material resources, genuine opportunities, and tangible results" (p. 38). Kieffer (1981), reporting the results of qualitative interviews with individuals who emerged as local leaders, described four conditions necessary for empowerment to occur: a *personal attitude*, or sense of self, that promotes active social involvement; a *knowledge, or capacity*, for critical analysis of the social and political systems which defines one's environment; an *ability to develop action strategies* and cultivate resources for attainment of one's goals; and an *ability to act* in concert with others to define and attain collective goals.

To date, efforts to measure empowerment in a quantitative manner have been limited to a few studies. Zimmerman and Rappaport (1988) examined the relationship between citizen participation and psychological empowerment as measured by 11 scales selected from the published literature. These scales assessed different aspects of personality, cognition, or motivation that were considered by the authors as indicative of empowerment. Their findings generally showed a convergence across measures in demonstrating that greater participation in community activities was associated with higher levels of empowerment. Gutierrez and Ortega (1991) developed three measures to assess different aspects of empowerment among Latinos. Two of their measures focused on political empowerment, commitment and ethnic activism, and the third measure focused on personal empowerment, conceptualized as change

strategy. The three measures were used to test the effects of group interventions designed to increase empowerment and were found to reflect the intervention conditions as predicted. These studies provide support for measuring empowerment as a multi-faceted construct and suggest that such measures can be sensitive to conditions that are plausibly indicative of empowerment. However, no studies to date have produced instruments that are designed to be used as general empowerment measures, and none has developed measures that focus specifically on empowerment in families whose members have disabilities.

INSTRUMENT DEVELOPMENT

Conceptual Framework

The development of the empowerment measure described in this paper began with the formation of a conceptual framework to serve as a guide for writing items. The framework is based upon the literature cited above, discussions with families who have children with serious emotional disabilities, and the contributions of staff from the Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children's Mental Health (RTC) who have ongoing contact with families. The framework focuses on different aspects of empowerment as states rather than causative conditions or processes. These states are not necessarily assumed to be constant; rather, they may change over time in response to experiences, new conditions, or evolving circumstances. This perspective is reflected in Staples' (1990) general definition of empowerment as: "...the ongoing capacity of individuals or groups to act on their own behalf to achieve a greater measure of control over their lives and destinies" (p. 30).

The framework consists of two dimensions: (1) the level of empowerment, and (2) the way that empowerment is expressed. With regard to the first dimension, empowerment can occur at three levels: (a) *Family*, that is, the immediate situation at home. This primarily involves the parent's management of day-to-day situations; (b) *Service System*, that is, professionals and agencies that provide services to the parent's own child. This primarily involves the parent's actively working with the service system to get services that are needed by his or her child; (c) *Community/Political*, that is, legislative bodies, policy makers, agencies, and community members who are concerned with or who influence services for children with emotional disorders and their families. This primarily involves the parent's advocacy for improved services for children in general, rather than specifically for her/his own child.

With regard to the second dimension, empowerment can again be expressed in three ways: (a) *Attitudes*, what a parent feels and believes; (b) *Knowledge*, what a parent knows and can potentially do; and (c) *Behaviors*, what a parent actually does. Each of these types of expressions can occur within each category of the level dimension. For example, empowerment with respect to the service system can be manifested as an attitude, e.g., "Professionals should ask me what services I want

for my child"; as knowledge, e.g., "I know what steps to take when I am concerned my child is receiving poor services"; and as a behavior, e.g., "I tell professionals what I think about services being provided to my child." Thus, combining the three categories on the two dimensions results in nine possible combinations, reflecting how empowerment may be experienced or expressed at a given point in time.

Scale Construction

The development of the Family Empowerment Scale (FES) followed standard scale construction techniques (Carmines & Zeller, 1979; Dawis, 1987; DeVellis, 1991). An item pool was generated to measure concepts related to each of the nine cells in the framework, and from this pool, three to four items per cell were selected on the basis of clarity, simplicity of wording, and relevance of content. Since the planned number of items per cell was very small, an effort was made to select items of rather similar substantive content in order to maximize homogeneity within cells (Dawis, 1987). The instrument that resulted from this process consisted of 28 items, each of which contained a statement, e.g., "I feel my family life is under control," and five response alternatives ranging from "not true at all," scored as 1, to "very true," scored as 5.

Pilot testing of the instrument was conducted with 94 parents of children with emotional disabilities. They were contacted through local parent support groups and through a national conference attended by a large number of family members. In addition to completing the instrument, 29 of these parents participated in focus groups that addressed issues of readability, clarity, and content of items. Each focus group consisted of approximately seven parents who received child care, dinner and a consultation fee for participation. Based on feedback from the focus groups as well as analyses of responses from the 94 completed questionnaires, revisions were made in existing items, and other items were added. The current version of the instrument consists of 34 items (see Figure 1).

Because the literature emphasizes distinctions among personal, interpersonal, and political levels of empowerment, the scoring strategy is designed to reflect the categories of the Level Dimension, i.e., Family, Service System, and Community/Political. Scoring is accomplished by summing responses from items within the Family (12 items), Service System (12 items), and Community/Political (10 items) categories to yield three subscores.

Data Collection

To obtain a sufficiently large sample for analyses of reliability and validity, we collected data from several sources. First, parent organizations in four locations, Wisconsin, Oregon, Mississippi, and the District of Columbia, were asked to distribute questionnaire booklets to their members. These were organizations for parents whose children have emotional, behavioral, or mental disorders. The focus of the organizations is on providing services to families

whose children have mental health problems; however, membership may include families whose children have multiple disabilities. The questionnaire booklets included the FES, a measure of parent-professional collaboration (not discussed here), and questions about the child and family. The latter questions asked about demographic characteristics, e.g., income, education, age, family structure, as well as information on child diagnosis, living arrangements, custody, and certain parental activities related to empowerment. The Research and Training Center (RTC) prepared questionnaire packets with postage, and the participating parent organizations addressed and mailed the packets to their members. Approximately two weeks later they also sent a follow-up postcard as a reminder. Questionnaires were completed anonymously and returned directly to the RTC in business-reply envelopes included in the packet. Respondents were offered two complimentary RTC publications for their participation; their anonymity was maintained by returning the questionnaire and order form in separate envelopes. In order to allow for the possibility of examining test-retest reliability, a box on the publication order form was included by which family members could indicate a willingness to complete another questionnaire in several weeks. The distribution of questionnaires occurred in June and July, 1992. A total of 369 questionnaires were distributed in Oregon, 820 in Wisconsin, 231 in Mississippi and 50 in Washington, DC. As of early August, 378 questionnaires had been returned for an overall return rate of 26%.

Questionnaires were also sent to 283 family members who had participated in a previous survey conducted by the RTC and who had indicated a willingness to participate in additional research. These individuals lived in 31 states and the Virgin Islands; henceforth, they will be referred to as the RTC sample. Questionnaire booklets were sent to them directly from the RTC using the same incentive and follow-up procedure described above. The questionnaires were mailed in June, 1992, and by early August, 116 had been returned for a return rate of 41%.

To obtain data for test-retest reliability, a second wave of questionnaires was sent to respondents who were part of the Oregon and RTC samples and who had expressed interest in additional research participation. This mailing occurred approximately four weeks after the first questionnaire booklet had been returned. By early August, 107 of 179 (60%) respondents who had children under the age of 21 had returned the second questionnaire. Because both questionnaire waves were anonymous, matches for purposes of calculating test-retest reliability were made on the basis of child and family demographic characteristics and ZIP code.

The analyses reported in this paper are based on 440 parents who reported having children under the age of 21. Parents of children 21 and older were excluded from the sample in order to limit the focus of analyses to issues relevant to minor children. The great majority of parents in the sample were female (94%), white (92%), and the biological or adoptive parent of the child (89%). The mean age was 40 ($SD = 6.6$) years. Over three-quarters (79%) had completed high school and 36% had completed college. Just over one-quarter (28%) lived in single parent households; 14% reported an annual gross household income below \$10,000, and 21% had household incomes greater than \$50,000.

	Level		
	Family	Service System	Community/Political
Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I feel confident in my ability to help my child grow and develop. (4) - I feel my family life is under control. (9) - I believe I can solve problems with my child when they happen. (21) - I feel I am a good parent. (34) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I feel that I have a right to approve all services my child receives. (1) - My opinion is just as important as professionals' opinions in deciding what services my child needs. (18) - Professionals should ask me what services I want for my child. (32) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I feel I can have a part in improving services for children in my community. (3) - I believe that other parents and I can have an influence on services for children. (17) - I feel that my knowledge and experience as a parent can be used to improve services for children and families. (25)
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I know what to do when problems arise with my child. (7) - I am able to get information to help me better understand my child. (16) - When I need help with problems in my family, I am able to ask for help from others. (26) - I have a good understanding of my child's disorder. (33) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I know the steps to take when I am concerned my child is receiving poor services. (5) - I am able to make good decisions about what services my child needs. (11) - I am able to work with agencies and professionals to decide what services my child needs. (12) - I know what services my child needs. (23) - I have a good understanding of the service system that my child is involved in. (30) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I understand how the service system for children is organized. (10) - I have ideas about the ideal service system for children. (14) - I know how to get agency administrators or legislators to listen to me. (22) - I know what the rights of parents and children are under the special education laws. (24)
Behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When problems arise with my child, I handle them pretty well. (2) - I make efforts to learn new ways to help my child grow and develop. (27) - When dealing with my child, I focus on the good things as well as the problems. (29) - When faced with a problem involving my child, I decide what to do and then do it. (31) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I make sure that professionals understand my opinions about what services my child needs. (6) - I make sure I stay in regular contact with professionals who are providing services to my child. (13) - I tell professionals what I think about services being provided to my child. (19) - When necessary, I take the initiative in looking for services for my child and family. (28) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I get in touch with my legislators when important bills or issues concerning children are pending. (8) - I help other families get the services they need. (15) - I tell people in agencies and government how services for children can be improved. (20)

Figure 1. Conceptual framework and item stems for Family Empowerment Scale. (Numbers in parentheses indicate item numbers.)

The children were predominantly white (85%), male (74%), with a mean age of 13.2 ($SD = 3.9$) years. Over three-quarters (76%) of the children lived with their biological or adoptive family at the time of the survey, 5% with extended or foster family, and the remainder lived in nonfamily settings, e.g., residential treatment, psychiatric hospitals, group homes, or juvenile justice settings. The majority of the children were in the custody of the survey respondent (85%) and the remainder were in state custody (7%) or in the custody of a person other than the respondent (8%). The most frequently reported children's diagnoses were: attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (55%), learning disability (36%), emotional disorder (33%), conduct disorder (20%), developmental disorder (18%), oppositional disorder (17%), and depression (16%). Many children (70%) had multiple diagnoses or conditions.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The analyses described here focus on the reliability and validity of the FES from several perspectives. Reliability was addressed through an examination of the internal consistency and temporal stability of instrument subscores. Validity was addressed through panel ratings of item content with respect to the empowerment framework, factor analysis of item responses, and an analysis of group differentiation on the basis of subscores.

Reliability

Internal Consistency. The internal consistency of FES subscores was examined through the computation of alpha coefficients (Cronbach, 1951) for the three subscores based on the Level Dimension of the conceptual framework: Family, Service System, and Community/Political. These coefficients, presented in Table 1, ranged from .87 to .88. They compare well with generally accepted standards of reliability whereby alpha coefficients of .70 are considered minimum (Nunnally, 1978) and coefficients of .80 to .90 are considered substantial (DeVellis, 1991).

Test-Retest, Reliability. Another reliability issue concerns the stability or constancy of responses across time, generally known as test-retest reliability. The examination of this issue is somewhat clouded by the difficulty of distinguishing

Table 1. Reliability Coefficients for the Level Dimension Subscores of the Family Empowerment Scale (FES)

Subscore	Internal Consistency ($n = 440$)	Test-Retest ($n = 107$)
Family	.88	.83
Service System	.87	.77
Community/Political	.88	.85

temporal variability in item responses, i.e., error across measurement occasions, from natural fluctuations in the phenomenon itself (Kelly & McGrath, 1988). That is, a completely reliable measure of empowerment might still show instability across time due to real changes in how empowerment is manifested or experienced. The relevancy of this issue was reflected in our discussions with parents who frequently commented that their feelings of empowerment varied with the events of the moment. A frustrating experience with a service provider or an especially good parenting experience could have a marked effect on these feelings.

We examined test-retest reliability by correlating two sets of matched item subscores based on responses from 107 family members who completed the FES a second time, three to four weeks following the initial administration. These Pearson correlations ranged from .77 to .85 and are presented in Table 1. The strength of these correlations provide some support for the stability of subscores over a short interval of time. Since a systematic increase or decrease in one set of test-retest scores would not be reflected in a correlational analysis, we also compared the two sets of subscores with paired *t* tests for mean differences. No significant differences were found, suggesting that the subscores did not systematically increase or decrease over the time interval.

Validity

Independent Item Ratings. The correspondence of instrument content to underlying theoretical constructs is a key issue in assessing validity. One perspective on this correspondence in the FES was obtained through independent ratings of items made on the basis of construct definitions. Twenty-five professionals who either were Graduate School of Social Work faculty or provided services to families and children served as raters. All had advanced degrees in the social or behavioral sciences, and none had prior familiarity with the relationship of items to the conceptual framework. Raters were given an overview of the empowerment framework, including definitions, and a form with which to classify items into the categories of each dimension. Two major issues were of interest here: the agreement among raters in classifying items, and the agreement of raters with the classification scheme of the conceptual framework.

To assess agreement among raters, kappa coefficients for multiple raters (Fleiss, 1981) were computed for each category of the Level Dimension and across all three categories. The coefficients were .83, .70, and .77 for the Family, Service System, and Community/Political categories, respectively; the overall coefficient was .77. Because kappa coefficients above .75 are considered indicative of substantial agreement, these findings suggest that raters classified items in a largely similar fashion.

To assess agreement with the original item classification scheme, kappa coefficients were computed between each rater and the item classification scheme across categories for the Level Dimension. Coefficients ranged from .47 to 1.00; 84% of the coefficients exceeded .75 and the average was .83. Thus most

raters provided ratings that were in substantial agreement with the classification scheme. Taken together these two analyses of independent ratings provide support for the correspondence of FES item content to the constructs underlying the instrument.

Factor Analysis. Another perspective on this same issue was obtained through factor analysis of item responses. Of interest here was the correspondence of the factor structure to the conceptual framework and the contribution of items to factors representing their respective categories. The analysis used the principle axis method of factor extraction with squared multiple correlations as communality estimates and the Varimax method of factor rotation. The number of factors to rotate was determined on the basis of a scree test (Cattell, 1966; Gorsuch, 1974) which indicated four major factors accounting for 52% of the variance. Table 2 presents factor loadings above .40 ordered by size of loadings, item numbers, and associated framework categories.

Factor I was defined by a strong core of items measuring parents' efforts to advocate for and improve services for children and families in general. The items here were concerned with parents contacting legislators and agency administrators, providing help to other families, and holding strong beliefs that they can have an influence on improving services. This factor corresponds well to the Community/Political category of the empowerment framework.

Factors II and IV were both defined by items measuring empowerment with respect to the service system. The major items loading on Factor II measured parents' knowledge in working with agencies and professionals to obtain services for their children. Specific item content in Factor II focused on parents' understanding of the service system and self-confidence in their decisions and capabilities. Factor IV was characterized by an emphasis on the inherent right of parents to make decisions about their children. This factor was concerned with what parents believe and, to some extent, what they do, whereas Factor II was primarily concerned with what parents know. Both correspond to the Service System category of the conceptual framework.

Factor III focused on empowerment within the family and has the closest correspondence to the Family category of the conceptual framework. It was defined by a strong core of items measuring confidence with respect to parenting and the ability to handle problems when they arise.

The findings from the factor analysis generally provided support for the correspondence of items to the Level Dimension of the conceptual framework. The strongest factors were defined largely by items that were associated with only one category on this dimension, Family, Service System, or Community/Political. In contrast, the correspondence of factors to the Expression Dimension of the framework was minimal. Only one factor, Factor II, was defined by a core of items from one category of this dimension, the Knowledge Category. For the most part, empirical distinctions among attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors were overshadowed by stronger differences among the levels of empowerment. In this respect, the findings from the factor analysis support the strategy of deriving subscores based on the Level Dimension of the instrument.

It is worth noting here that although the factor analysis produced independent or uncorrelated factors under the constraints of an orthogonal model, the subscores themselves are not independent. The zero-order correlations of the Family subscore with the Service System and Community/Political subscores were .77 and .63, respectively. The correlation of the Service System subscore with the Community/Political subscore was .71. Thus, the findings of the factor

Table 2. Factor Loadings $\geq .40$ for Family Empowerment Scale (FES) Items ($N = 440$)

Item	Dimension		Factor ^c			
	Level ^a	Expression ^b	I	II	III	IV
20	Comm	Beh	.67			
22	Comm	Know	.60	.44		
15	Comm	Beh	.60			
25	Comm	Att	.58			
3	Comm	Att	.58			
8	Comm	Beh	.57			
17	Comm	Att	.56			
14	Comm	Know	.49			
16	Fam	Know	.49	.45		
26	Fam	Know	.41			
5	Sys	Know		.65		
30	Sys	Know		.62		
12	Sys	Know		.56		
10	Comm	Know	.48	.55		
11	Sys	Know		.54		
23	Sys	Know		.48		.43
6	Sys	Beh		.46		
24	Comm	Know	.41	.46		
13	Sys	Beh		.46		
4	Fam	Att			.70	
2	Fam	Beh			.66	
34	Fam	Att			.60	
7	Fam	Know		.43	.59	
21	Fam	Att			.58	
9	Fam	Att			.57	
29	Fam	Beh			.56	
31	Fam	Beh		.47	.47	
33	Fam	Know			.40	
18	Sys	Att				.57
32	Sys	Att				.49
27	Fam	Beh				.47
19	Sys	Beh				.47

^aLevel: Fam = Family, Sys = Service System, Comm = Community/Political

^bExpression: Att = Attitude, Know = Knowledge, Beh = Behavior

^cEigenvalues for the four factors are 11.71, 1.80, 1.14, and .95, respectively.

analysis should be viewed as evidence for the distinctiveness of the item groups representing the Level categories of the framework, not as an indication that the categories or their respective subscores are independent.

Group Differentiation. The capacity of a measure to empirically differentiate known groups assumed to differ on the measure's underlying construct can be viewed as evidence of construct validity. In the context of empowerment, a measure might be considered as demonstrating validity if scores were markedly different between one group that behaviorally exhibited high empowerment and another group that did not show such characteristics. We did not have independently derived indicators of empowerment within our sample, since all data were based on a single method, the self-report of parents. However, the questionnaire did include two checklists of activities which served as behavioral indicators of empowerment, particularly of the community/political type. Parents were asked to indicate whether or not they participated in each listed activity.

Activities were combined into six logical types: (1) advisory activities: parents who served on a task force or agency board concerned with children's mental health issues; (2) political activities: parents who contacted legislators or provided legislative testimony regarding children's mental health issues within the last year; (3) legal activities: parents who were involved in a formal complaint or court action with respect to services for children within the last year; (4) assistance activities: parents who assisted other parents in dealing with the service system within the last year; (5) organizing activities: parents who helped to organize a group to advocate for or discuss children's mental health issues within the year; and (6) participant activities: parents who became involved in children's mental health issues by giving a speech, writing an article, sending a letter to a newspaper, or attending a meeting or hearing within the last year. Parents were assigned a dichotomous score (Yes/No) for each activity type based on their responses to the checklist.

For each activity type, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to compare those who engaged in that type of activity with those who did not. The dependent variables were the three FES subscores, Family, Service System, and Community/Political. Table 3 summarizes the results.

The multivariate effects for all six activity types were significant, suggesting that the subscores in combination discriminated parents who were involved in each activity from those who were not. In all groups, univariate F tests of individual FES subscores were also significant, with higher empowerment scores on the Family, Service System, and Community/Political categories associated with involvement in activities that were indicative of empowerment. In the legal activities comparison, the Community/Political subscore was significant at $p < .001$, the Family subscore at $p < .01$, and the Service System subscore at $p < .05$. The lower significance level of the Service System subscore is understandable since legal actions in the disability area are often taken in response to difficulties in obtaining services for one's own child, which may be reflected in relatively low empowerment with respect to the service system. The Community/Political subscore, on the other hand, measures a different set of

attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors, some of which may be a product of activities associated with legal or complaint procedures. Overall, the results of this analysis provide some evidence for the validity of FES subscores in discriminating groups of parents who differ on activities that are particularly community focused. The analysis did not address the issue of group discrimination with respect to activities that focus more on the family or service system. This issue awaits future research.

DISCUSSION

Empirical analyses of the Family Empowerment Scale (FES) suggest that key aspects of parents' and other family caregivers' empowerment can be measured in a valid and reliable fashion. As efforts to refine and measure the concept of empowerment continue, several questions merit careful examination.

Table 3. Summary of MANOVA Results ($N = 440$)

Activity ^a	Family Subscore	Service System Subscore	Community/ Political Subscore	Multivariate F ^b
Advisory: Yes (n = 86)	49.89	53.56	41.37	43.58***
Advisory: No (n = 354)	45.83	48.60	31.44	
F	22.18***	36.60***	123.76***	
Political: Yes (n = 135)	48.78	52.59	39.61	52.80***
Political: No (n = 305)	45.66	48.24	30.62	
F	17.57***	38.40***	141.41***	
Legal: Yes (n = 106)	48.55	50.85	37.25	13.41***
Legal: No (n = 334)	46.01	49.17	32.15	
F	9.88**	4.58*	31.84***	
Assisting: Yes (n = 265)	48.46	51.37	36.76	48.30***
Assisting: No (n = 175)	43.84	46.85	28.26	
F	46.04***	47.43***	142.74***	
Organizing: Yes (n = 79)	50.62	53.03	40.52	
Organizing: No (n = 361)	45.75	48.82	31.82	29.26***
F	30.58***	24.14***	82.55***	
Participating: Yes (n = 185)	48.63	51.47	37.26	27.91***
Participating: No (n = 255)	45.16	48.19	30.56	
F	25.31***	24.21***	80.70***	

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

^aValues are means of each subscore; subscores are based on sums of item responses; F rows are univariate tests of each subscore.

^bF approximation of Hotelling's T^2

First, there should be careful scrutiny of the idea that parents of children with emotional disabilities may go through a developmental process with regard to empowerment. According to this notion, parents are likely to focus first on immediate family concerns with regard to their child's development and/or behavior, then turn their attention to securing the information and services they need to address their child's needs, after which they may engage in individual or collective action to assist other families and address the needs of all children. Although this idea has been proposed by a number of authors (e.g., Friesen, 1989; Fine & Borden, 1989), it has not yet been subjected to systematic study. Anecdotal evidence suggests that for some family members, difficulty in obtaining appropriate services for their children is a galvanizing experience leading to involvement in the community/political arena.

Another issue that needs further examination is the degree to which each of the three levels (Family, Service System, and Community/Political) is differentially responsive to targeted interventions. Although the results of our instrument development efforts with the FES suggest three distinct categories, we do not yet have good information about the degree to which changes in one category relate to, or are stimulated by, changes in another. In other words, does increased empowerment in one category tend to result in increased empowerment in other categories, perhaps because of greater assertiveness, self-confidence, or feelings of self-efficacy, or is each category relatively independent?

Future research with the FES might include further exploration of the means by which parents gain empowerment, and the various paths through which their empowerment may be pursued and developed. For example, some parents have told us that a particularly good relationship with a service provider has been instrumental in their becoming more empowered. However, other parents have reported that poor services have also had a similar effect by serving as an impetus to actively search for better resources. In the process, they have discovered inner strengths and abilities, thus becoming more empowered. Clearly, the process of becoming empowered is a multifaceted one, and little is known about it.

Our own investigations with the FES will include topics such as the degree to which family members' empowerment scores increase over time and in comparison to others as a result of their systematic involvement in assessment, service planning and implementation for their own children, and whether collaborative transactions with professionals are associated with greater parent empowerment. Other research under way will examine the extent to which family members who receive consultation and training designed specifically to increase their effectiveness as members of boards, task forces and other planning and decision-making bodies show an increase in empowerment as a result of this intervention.

The results of this study support the use of the FES to assess the effectiveness of interventions or programs designed to increase the empowerment of parents or other family caregivers. Use of the FES should also help program designers to more clearly specify which aspects of their programs are meant to promote family empowerment and at which levels, i.e., Family, Service System or Community/Political. The FES may also be useful with other populations,

perhaps with modifications to include issues central to other disability groups, especially those involving minor children.

Concepts related to empowerment are playing an increasingly important role in shaping services for families whose children have disabilities. Although family empowerment is often stated as a program goal, the concept often lacks specificity and the efficacy of interventions designed to "empower" have largely been untested. The theoretical development of the construct of empowerment should go hand in hand with operationalization and measurement. The Family Empowerment Scale represents a step in this direction.

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