

Finances, Religion, and the FAAR Model: How Religion Exacerbates and Alleviates Financial Stress

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Background & Purpose

Previous research suggests that the association between religion and financial stress is complicated—some studies have found that religion exacerbates financial stress (Gutierrez et al., 2017), while others have found that religion alleviates financial stress (Bradshaw & Ellison, 2010).

Drawing upon interviews of 172 religious parents and religious leaders in Ireland and the United Kingdom, the purpose of this study is to better understand the relationship between religion and financial stress, and to identify potential processes and mechanisms behind this relationship.

Methods

- 110 religious parents, 62 religious leaders
- 80% Christian (34% from various Protestant denominations, 28% Catholic, 12% non-denominational Christian, 3% Latter-day Saint, 3% other), 10% Islamic, 4% Jewish, 5% others (Hindu, Buddhist, Baha'i)
- 59% male, 41% female
- 78% White, 22% other (African, Asian, Middle Eastern, Indian, Caribbean, Latino/a)
- Semi-structured interviews, coding in pairs using NVivo (inter-rater reliability ~.90)

Note: Participants were not asked anything about finances. However, as they described the impact of religion on their individual lives and their families, in all but two interviews the participants discussed, without prompt, how religion exacerbated and/or alleviated financial stress.

Results

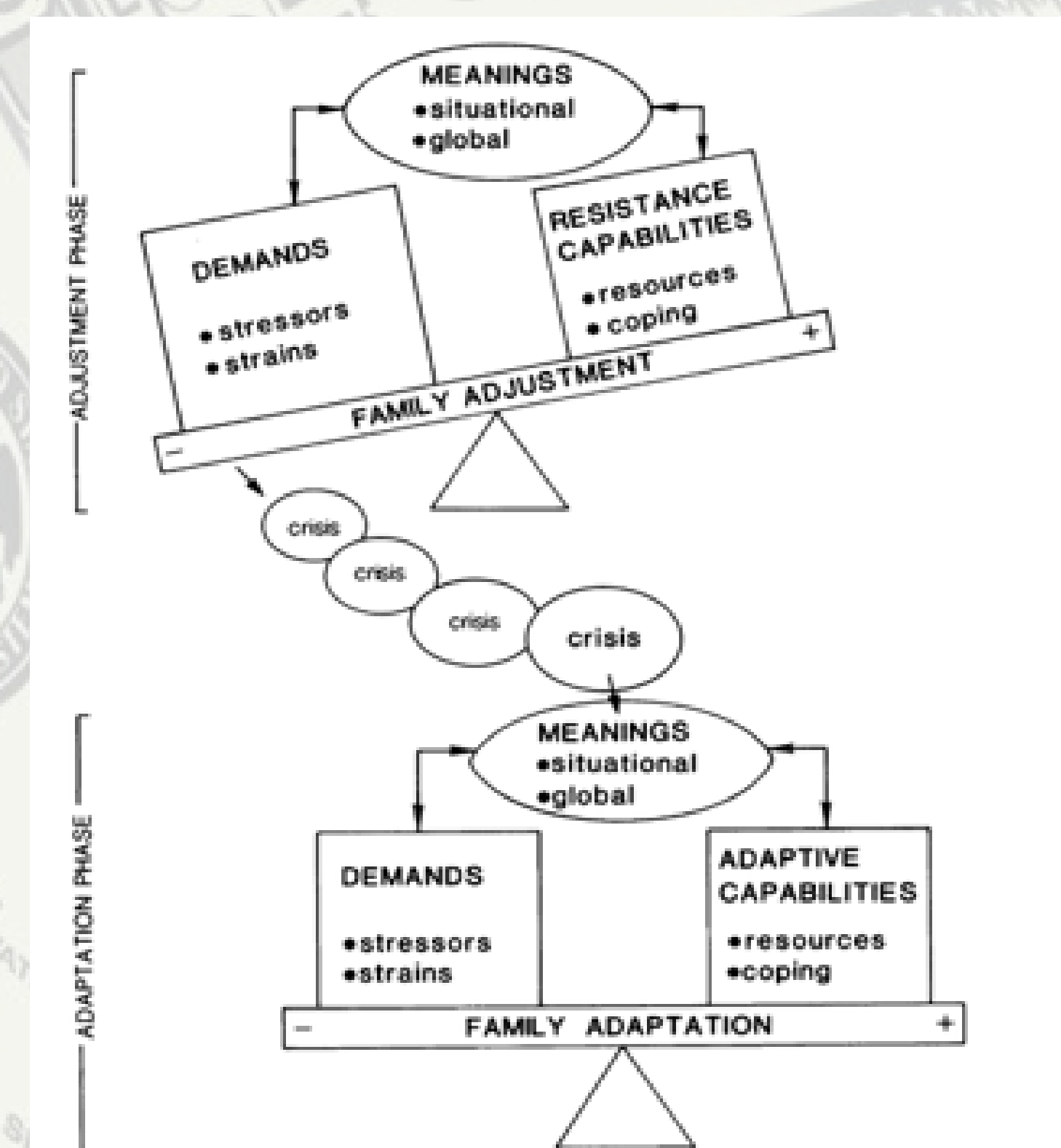


Figure 1. The family adjustment and adaptation response (FAAR) model (Patterson, 1988).

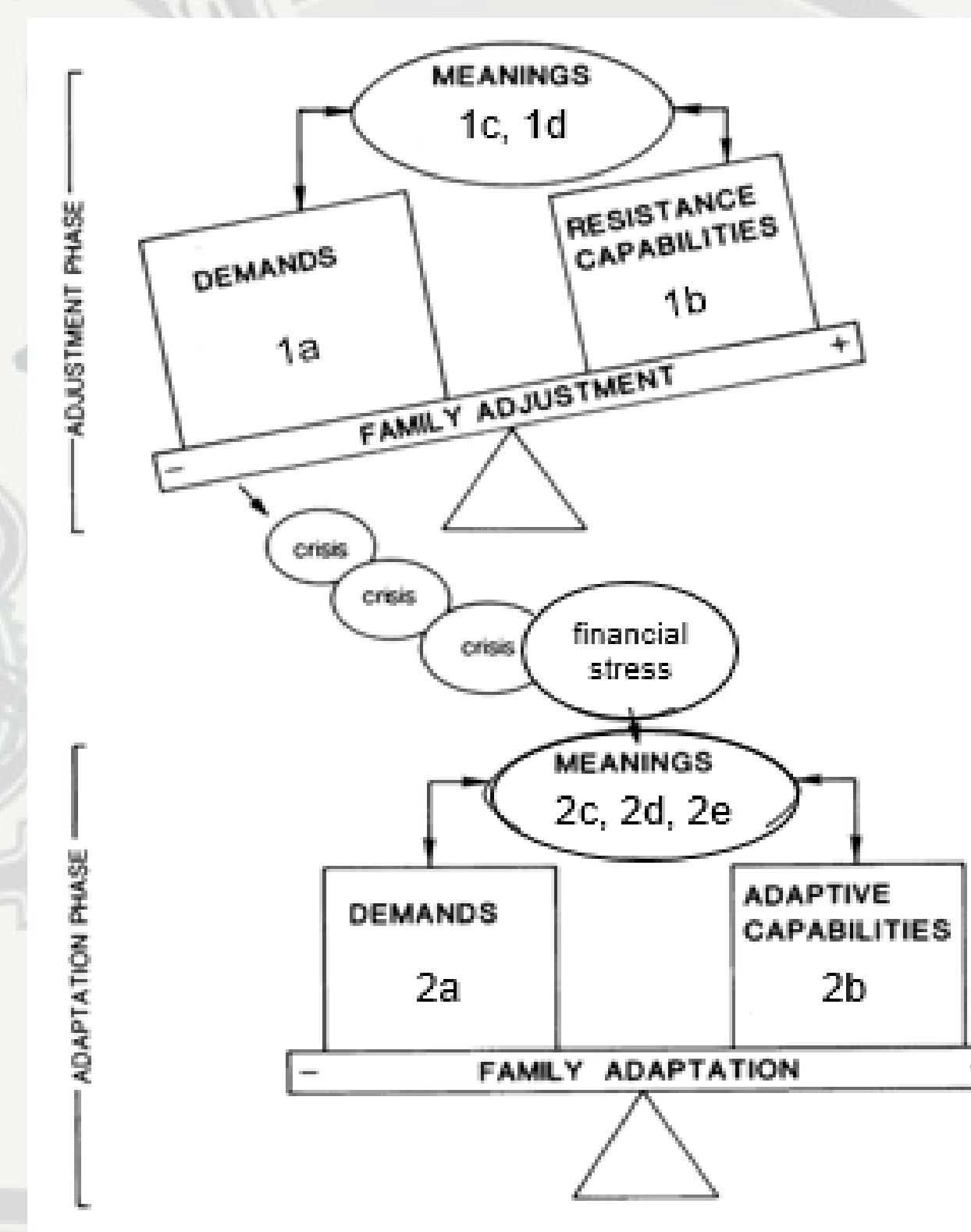


Figure 2. Findings applied to the FAAR model (Patterson, 1988).

Theme 1: Religion Exacerbated Financial Stress

Concept 1a: Religion increased financial obligations. John (male, Amish Mennonite): “We moved to Ireland 20 years ago to bring the Gospel to the Irish people. . . . We could’ve probably had a lot more money if we had stayed in the States and built the business that we had going then, but we felt . . . [that] if there is a way to help people come to know the Lord, that is what we want to do.”

Concept 1b: Religion required time sacrifice. Omar (male, Muslim): “I decided that if I want to be . . . committed to religion, I need to really pray five times a day. . . . That forces everything else to fit around it—putting second work and social activities, even free time.”

Concept 1c: Religious values clashed with work. Ali (male, Muslim): “I decided not to work in finance because some of the finance activities do not agree with my religion.”

Concept 1d: Religious values clashed with materialism. Anne (female, Episcopalian): “There is this expectation of having certain things and living a certain way. There is an expectation that this is how you would live, this is the type of holidays you would go one, and these are the type of cars you would drive. That can be difficult for families if you . . . don’t necessarily have the same values.”

Theme 2: Religion Alleviated Financial Stress

Concept 2a: Religion reduced materialism. Lucy (female, Quaker): “We aren’t [into] ‘keeping up with the Joneses.’ . . . For instance, we’ve just moved to a little flat. We have downsized . . . and a lot of our friends can’t understand [why] we would want to do this. We don’t need all the space, and we don’t need all those possessions. We’ve gotten rid of loads of them, and it’s been wonderful. I’ve so enjoyed having less. . . . Now to us that [has] to do with our faith.”

Concept 2b: Religion brought monetary blessings. Rachel (female, Methodist): “We’ve had to rely [on God] in many different ways—in all part of our lives, really—one of the main ones being financially. [We’ve been] praying and asking God every day, ‘Please provide, please provide.’ And we feel that He has, and I believe that God has always provided, and He’s never let us down.”

Concept 2c: Religious giving brought satisfaction. Amber (female, Christian): “When your life’s [about] something more than yourself, it brings a real level of purpose and joy and reason for getting up in the morning.”

Concept 2d: Religion improved perspectives on work. Natalie (female, Christian): “I do everything I do as a Christian. Jesus is my boss. . . . There was something going on at work that was really stressful. . . . I said, ‘God will see me through.’”

Concept 2e: Religion fostered a positive outlook on financial struggles. Kate (female, Catholic): “Whatever happened, even if I’m homeless and on the streets, [God] created me to be here. He gives me the biggest purpose in my life, whatever happens.”

Table 1

Numeric Content Analysis

Theme	# References	# Sources	% Interviews	Average # Ref. per Int.
Religion Exacerbated Financial Stress				
(1a) Religion Increased Financial Obligations	77	41	30.6	0.6
(1b) Religion Required Time Sacrifice	188	93	69.4	1.5
(1c) Religious Values Clashed with Work	181	89	66.4	1.4
(1d) Religious Values Clashed with Materialism	152	66	49.2	1.2
Religion Alleviated Financial Stress				
(2a) Religion Reduced Materialism	118	64	47.8	0.9
(2b) Religion Brought Monetary Blessings	66	42	31.3	0.5
(2c) Religious Giving Brought Satisfaction	89	58	43.3	0.7
(2d) Religion Improved Perspectives on Work	129	63	47.0	1.0
(2e) Religion Fostered a Positive Outlook on Financial Struggles	74	45	33.6	0.6
Total	1,077	132	98.5	8.3

Implications & Conclusions

Relevant To:

- Researchers
- Clinicians
- Religious leaders
- Religious individuals/families

Key Takeaways:

- Importance of balance (many good things, when taken to extremes, can exacerbate stress)
- Religion can both help and harm (reduce the negative, optimize the positive)

