

A Conceptual Model of Family Quality of Life Based on Nahj al-Balagha: A Qualitative Study Using Inductive Content Analysis

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Abstract

The present study aims to identify and conceptualization the components of family quality of life based of Nahj al-Balagha and to develop an independent, text-driven conceptual model. This research was conducted using a qualitative method with an inductive content analysis approach. Data were derived from the sermons, letters, and aphorisms of Nahj al-Balagha. After coding concepts related to family life, five main dimensions of family quality of life were identified: ethics and spirituality, marital relations, child upbringing, family psychological tranquility, and social responsibility. The findings suggest that, in Imam Ali's perspective, family quality of life is rooted more in inner moral reform, dignity, justice, patience, and social responsibility than in material factors. The proposed model offers a culturally grounded framework that may inform future theoretical and applied research in the field of family studies.

Keywords: Family Quality of Life, Nahj al-Balagha, Islamic Family, Qualitative Content Analysis, Imam Ali.

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Introduction

The family, as the first and most enduring social institution, plays a fundamental role in the transmission of values, the formation of individual identity, and the promotion of psychological well-being (Fenton, 2017). Accordingly, the concept of quality of life has attracted extensive scholarly attention, yielding diverse and sometimes competing interpretations. Within the Benthamite tradition, quality of life is largely equated with pleasure and satisfaction, whereas the Aristotelian perspective conceives it as a meaningful and complete life. In contrast to Bentham's emphasis on hedonism, Aristotle conceptualizes well-being as flourishing—encompassing success, virtue, and the realization of a purposeful life (Sirgy, 2021). Contemporary frameworks have attempted to operationalize quality of life through multidimensional models. For instance, Schalock et al. (2016) identify eight domains: personal development, self-determination, interpersonal relationships, social inclusion, rights, emotional well-being, physical well-being, and material well-being. Parallel to these developments, scholars have approached quality of life through both objective indicators—such as health, education, crime rates, environmental conditions, and income—and subjective indicators, including life satisfaction, happiness, and satisfaction across life domains (e.g., family, social, and occupational life). Kim-Prieto and Diener (2005) distinguish between quality of life and subjective well-being, arguing that the former generally refers to the desirability of life conditions, often emphasizing external and objective factors, whereas the latter focuses on individuals' internal experiences and perceptions. Cummins (2018) contends that subjective well-being may serve as a proxy for objective quality of life and proposes its measurement as a reliable indicator. In contrast, Michalos (2008) emphasizes the necessity of integrating both objective and subjective indicators to achieve a comprehensive assessment. Despite this diversity, quality of life is generally understood to encompass happiness, health, self-esteem, autonomy, mental health, independence, and life satisfaction. In the context of the family, this concept assumes both individual-centered and family-centered dimensions. Hoffman et al. (2006) identify six individual domains—advocacy/support, emotional well-being, health, physical environment, productivity, and social well-being—and four family-centered domains, including family daily life, parenting, family interactions, and financial well-being.

Family quality of life, therefore, extends beyond material welfare to include ethical, psychological, educational, and social dimensions. Nevertheless, many contemporary studies continue to assess it primarily through economic indicators, marital satisfaction, or mental health, with comparatively limited attention to its ethical and spiritual foundations.

A historical review of the concept reveals a gradual shift from objective and individual-centered approaches toward multidimensional and family-oriented frameworks. In the 1960s and 1970s, quality of life was predominantly defined through objective indicators such as income and living standards (Campbell et al., 1976), treating the individual as an independent unit whose well-being depended on external conditions. From the 1980s onward, subjective dimensions gained prominence, particularly through Diener's (1984) conceptualization of quality of life as individuals' perceptions of their living conditions and their experiences of positive and negative affect. Humanistic theories, such as Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, further emphasized self-actualization and the fulfillment of higher-order needs.

During the 1990s, the concept entered the field of health, leading to models such as health-related quality of life, which focused on physical and psychological functioning (Sherbourne et al, 1992). Although these models incorporated psychological aspects, they largely remained individual-centered. With the expansion of systems theory in the late 1980s and early 1990s, attention shifted toward the family as an interactive system. Olson's Circumplex Model (2000), for example, highlighted cohesion and adaptability, linking quality of life to family functioning and balance rather than solely to individual factors. From the 2000s onward, family quality of life emerged as an independent construct, conceptualized as the collective experience of family members across domains such as relationships, emotional well-being, support, and social participation (Brown et al., 2006; Summers et al., 2006).

More recently, Cummins' (2024) homeostasis theory suggests that human systems—biological, psychological, and social—tend to maintain equilibrium in order to prevent system breakdown. However, while this perspective explains the maintenance of balance, it does not sufficiently address the normative direction or value-based orientation of such equilibrium. Despite significant advancements, existing models remain limited in providing a comprehensive framework. Early objective and subjective models successfully identified key indicators but often neglected the social and familial context. Systemic models, such as Olson's (2000), underscore the structural importance of cohesion and flexibility but tend to be primarily descriptive and lack a normative or value-based foundation to guide family relationships. Similarly, family-centered models emphasize functional and perceptual dimensions while paying less attention to foundational internal factors such as ethics, spirituality, and human virtues. It thus appears that a common limitation across these approaches is the absence of an internal regulatory core grounded in ethical values—one capable of orienting and integrating the multiple dimensions of family quality of life. This gap suggests the need to

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revisit religious texts, particularly Nahj al-Balagha, in order to conceptualize quality of life beyond external conditions and functional outcomes, and at the level of the inner structure of the individual and the family. Research on Nahj al-Balagha has predominantly focused on themes such as social justice, governance, individual ethics, and education (Motahhari, 1999; Reyshahri, 2011). Within the Islamic tradition, the family is not merely a biological unit but the nucleus of human formation and development. Nahj al-Balagha presents a comprehensive vision of human life in which the family occupies a central position. The teachings of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib on ethics, justice, patience, self-restraint, and social responsibility are directly or indirectly (Motahhari, 1999).

In recent decades, although studies on Nahj al-Balagha have expanded considerably, they have largely concentrated on political, ethical, and anthropological dimensions (Motahhari, 1999; Javadi Amoli, 2013). The family has typically been addressed only incidentally, often within broader discussions of ethics or education. Reyshahri (2011), in the *Encyclopedia of Nahj al-Balagha*, refers to themes such as child upbringing, kinship ties, and social responsibility; however, these have not been integrated into a coherent model of family quality of life. Similarly, works such as *Alid Wisdom* emphasize individual moral development, while the structural relationship between such development and the family system remains underexplored (Javadi Amoli, 2013). Recent studies on family and Islamic lifestyle inspired by Nahj al-Balagha have also tended to focus on specific dimensions rather than offering a comprehensive conceptualization. For example, Akbari et al. (2024) demonstrate that religious teachings—particularly those found in Nahj al-Balagha—emphasize emotional bonds, mutual respect, and the role of parents. While these findings highlight the importance of love, responsibility, and constructive interaction in enhancing family functioning, they do not culminate in a systematic model of family quality of life.

Consequently, the primary gap in the literature lies in the absence of a model-building, family-centered approach that is directly grounded in the text of Nahj al-Balagha. Most existing studies have treated Nahj al-Balagha as an inspirational or supplementary source rather than as a foundational text capable of generating an independent conceptual model. This indicates an overlooked within the internal structure of the text itself. Accordingly, the central problem of this research is that previous studies have not systematically explored the potential of Nahj al-Balagha for conceptual model development in the domain of family quality of life. In response, the present study adopts an inductive content analysis approach to examine the text directly and to avoid the imposition of external theoretical frameworks. The study seeks to answer the following question: **What are the**

dimensions of family quality of life from the perspective of Nahj al-Balagha, and how are these dimensions conceptually related?

Method

this study adopts a qualitative research design and employs an inductive content analysis approach. Inductive content analysis is a systematic method for extracting concepts and themes from textual data, in which categories and classifications are derived from the data itself rather than imposed through predetermined theoretical frameworks. This approach is particularly suitable for studies aiming to uncover implicit meanings within religious and interpretive texts. In the present study, this method was employed to identify the dimensions of family quality of life as they emerge directly from the text of Nahj al-Balagha, without imposing external theoretical assumptions.

The research corpus consists of the full text of Nahj al-Balagha, including sermons, letters, and aphorisms, based on the translation and commentary of Shahidi (2019). Given the exploratory nature of the study and its focus on family quality of life, purposive sampling was employed. Accordingly, textual segments that directly or indirectly referred to themes such as family relationships, child upbringing, individual ethics, social interactions, and lifestyle were selected for analysis. The selection criteria included conceptual relevance to the family, interpretability in the context of quality of life, and richness of meaning.

Data were collected through a documentary method involving a comprehensive and repeated reading of the text. During this process, meaning units—defined as statements or expressions of themes of family, human relationships, education, and psychological tranquility—were identified and extracted (Shahidi, 2019). Data analysis followed the inductive content analysis framework and was conducted in three sequential stages: In the first stage, the text was examined line by line, and initial concepts related to family quality of life were identified. Each meaning unit was assigned an open code, representing discrete and context-specific ideas embedded in the text. In the second stage, conceptually similar codes were grouped together into broader categories. Through constant comparison, these categories were refined and organized into subthemes and subsequently into overarching themes. This step aimed to develop a coherent structure of interrelated concepts. In the final stage, the identified themes were further abstracted to form higher-level conceptual dimensions representing family quality of life. This stage involved the integration and interpretation of categories to construct a unified conceptual framework.

To enhance the credibility of the findings, repeated engagement with the text and systematic documentation of the coding and analysis process were undertaken. The researcher made a deliberate effort to minimize the influence of prior theoretical assumptions in order to ensure that the concepts emerged inductively from the data. However, given the interpretive nature of religious texts, the role of the researcher in meaning-making is unavoidable. To mitigate this influence,

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the analysis was conducted in a systematic and evidence-based manner, grounded in explicit textual references (Reyshahri, 2011).

Finding

The analysis of the data yielded a structured set of concepts related to family quality of life derived from the text of Nahj al-Balagha. Through the inductive analysis process, meaning units relevant to the research focus were identified and organized into an initial coding structure.

Table 1 presents a segment of this coding structure, illustrating the relationship between extracted textual units and their corresponding analytical categories. This presentation aims to provide transparency regarding the data underlying the identified dimension

Table1. inductive coding process of family quality of life based on Nahj al Balagha

Meaning unit	Open code	Category	Conceptual/abstract dimension (theme)
"I advise you to observe piety (taqwa)"	Recommendation of piety	Moral values	Ethics and spirituality
"Organize your affairs"	Orderliness in life	Self-management	Ethics and spirituality
"Truthfulness leads to salvation"	Honesty	Moral integrity	Ethics and spirituality
"Justice places things in their proper position"	Justice	Moral justice	Ethics and spirituality
Whoever reforms what is between him and God...	Self-reform	Relationship with God	Ethics and spirituality
"Live with them (your wives) in kindness"	Kind treatment of spouse	Positive interaction	Marital relations
Treat your women with kindness	Good conduct with spouse	Mutual respect	Marital relations
"Be gentle and tolerant with them in all situations"	Tolerance in marriage	Flexibility in relationships	Marital relations
"don't be like a savage beast toward them"	Avoidance of violence	Behavioral control	Marital relations
The best of you is the best to his family	Kindness to family	Emotional support	Marital relations
"The heart of a child is like an empty land"	Childs readiness for education	Developmental capacity	Child upbringing

"Hasten to educate them"	Early education	Moral training	Child upbringing
"Teach him the book of God"	Religious education	Value transmission	Child upbringing
"Honor your children"	Respect for children	Child dignity	Child upbringing
"Guide them toward righteous deeds"	Encouraging good behavior	Behavioral guidance	Child upbringing
"Whoever controls his anger..."	Anger control	Emotional regulation	Family psychological tranquility
"Forbearance is a virtue"	Patience	Emotional tolerance	Family psychological tranquility
"Patience is the key to relief"	Endurance	Resilience	Family psychological tranquility
"Contentment is a wealth that never diminishes"	contentment	Inner satisfaction	Family psychological tranquility
"Greed corrupts faith"	Avoiding greed	Psychological balance	Family psychological tranquility
"Many minds fall due to temptations"	Controlling desires	Emotional regulation	Family psychological tranquility
"Be mindful of orphans"	Caring for orphans	Social support	Family responsibility
"Be an enemy to the oppressor"	Opposing injustice	Justice orientation	Family responsibility
"Be a helper of the oppressed"	Supporting the oppressed	Social empathy	Family responsibility
"The best worship is reconciling between people"	Conflict resolution	Social cohesion	Family responsibility
"Maintain kinship ties"	Maintaining family ties	Kinship relations	Family responsibility
"Helping others atones for sins"	Helping other	Altruism	Family responsibility

Table 1 illustrates the systematic process of inductive content analysis employed in this study. Meaning units extracted from the text of Nahj al-Balagha were first transformed into open codes. These codes were subsequently grouped into cate-

gories based on conceptual similarities. In the final stage, the categories were abstracted into broader conceptual dimensions representing family quality of life. This process reflects a progression from raw textual data to higher-level conceptualization, which is a defining feature of inductive content analysis. The analysis resulted in the identification of five main dimensions: ethics and spirituality, marital relations, child upbringing, family psychological tranquility, and family responsibility. Each dimension is elaborated below with reference to illustrative examples from the text

Ethical and spirituality

The findings indicate that ethics and spirituality constitute the foundational dimension of family quality of life in Nahj al-Balagha. From the perspective of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib, the quality of external relationships, including those within the family, is rooted in the inner moral state of the individual. As stated: “Whoever rectifies his inner self, God will rectify his outward conduct” (Nahj al-Balagha, Wisdom 423; Shahidi, 2019). This principle suggests that family quality of life is not primarily determined by external conditions, but rather by the ethical and spiritual condition of its members. Furthermore, piety (taqwa) is introduced as a central organizing principle of human life (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 113; Shahidi, 2019), indicating that a stable and healthy family is grounded in moral virtues. From this perspective, the absence of ethical foundations undermines the stability of family life (Motahhari, 1999).

Marital relations

The analysis of the text shows that marital relations in Nahj al-Balagha are grounded in the principle of human dignity rather than power or domination. The expression “your equal in creation” (nazīr laka fī al-khalq) (Nahj al-Balagha, Letter 53; Shahidi, 2019) provides a conceptual basis for understanding interpersonal relationships, including those within the family. Within this framework, marital relations are shaped by dignity, justice, and forbearance, and any form of humiliation, coercion, or violence is implicitly rejected. This orientation is further reinforced in Letter 31, where gentleness, consultation, and avoidance of harshness in interactions with close others are emphasized (Nahj al-Balagha, Letter 31; Shahidi, 2019). These findings suggest that the quality of marital relations is closely linked to ethical conduct and respectful interaction.

Child upbringing

Child upbringing in Nahj al-Balagha is conceptualized as a deliberate, gradual, and ethically grounded process. Imam Ali (peace be upon him) describes the child’s heart as highly receptive: “Indeed, the heart of a youth is like empty land” (Nahj al-Balagha, Letter 31; Shahidi, 2019). This metaphor highlights the formative role of the family in shaping the early and fundamental aspects of a child’s personality. The text further emphasizes that parents must engage in self-education prior to educating others (Nahj al-Balagha, Wisdom 73; Shahidi, 2019), thereby linking the moral development of children to the ethical state of parents. Accordingly, family quality of life is closely associated with the moral and educational processes within the family (Reyshahri, 2011).

Family psychological tranquility

The findings demonstrate that psychological tranquility within the family is not incidental but is achieved through emotional regulation and self-control. In Nahj al-Balagha, particular emphasis is placed on the management of anger and the avoidance of negative emotional states. Imam Ali (peace be upon him) warns: “Anger is a blazing fire” (Nahj al-Balagha, Wisdom 255; Shahidi, 2019). He also identifies resentment as a barrier to inner peace (Nahj al-Balagha, Wisdom 226; Shahidi, 2019). These teachings suggest that the presence of patience, forbearance (ḥilm), and rational interaction contributes to psychological stability within the family. Consequently, emotional discipline is a key determinant of family quality of life (Javadi Amoli, 2013).

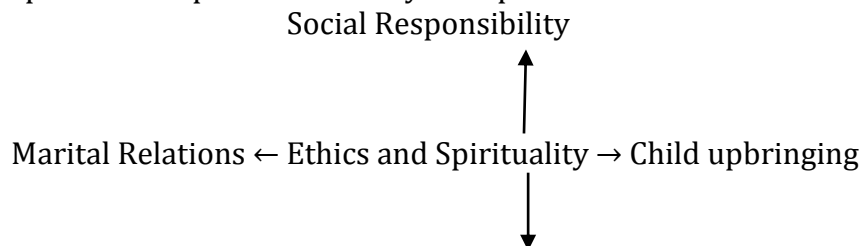
Social responsibility

The analysis further reveals that the family in Nahj al-Balagha is conceptualized as a socially responsible unit. Imam Ali (peace be upon him) explicitly emphasizes care for vulnerable members of society: “Fear God regarding orphans” (Nahj al-Balagha, Letter 47; Shahidi, 2019). In addition, maintaining kinship ties (ṣilat al-raḥim), supporting others, and engaging in acts of social responsibility are presented as essential components of a healthy family life (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 193; Shahidi, 2019). These findings indicate that family quality of life extends beyond internal relations and includes active engagement with the broader social environment.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that family quality of life in Nahj al-Balagha is structured as an interconnected and network-like system in which ethics and spirituality constitute the central and organizing core. The remaining dimensions—marital relations, child upbringing, family psychological tranquility, and family responsibility—derive their coherence and functional significance from this core. In the absence of such a moral foundation, these dimensions lose their integrative role and stability. This conceptualization differs fundamentally from reductionist approaches that interpret quality of life primarily as a function of external or material conditions. Instead, the present findings support an understanding of quality of life as an ethically grounded and existential reality, rooted in the internal moral state of individuals (Motahhari, 1999).

The proposed conceptual model may be represented as follows:



As illustrated, ethics and spirituality function as the central axis of the model, with all other dimensions interconnected and dependent upon it. This structure highlights the integrative role of moral and spiritual values in shaping family quality of life.

The findings are partially aligned with contemporary family theories. For example, Olson's Circumplex Model (2000) emphasizes cohesion, adaptability, and communication as key determinants of family functioning. Similarly, in the present study, components such as positive interaction, tolerance, and mutual respect indicate the importance of relational quality in maintaining family stability. However, a fundamental distinction lies in the underlying framework. While contemporary models primarily focus on the *how* of family interactions—namely patterns of communication and behavioral functioning—the perspective derived from Nahj al-Balagha emphasizes the *why* and the *direction* of these interactions. In other words, relationships are not only evaluated in terms of effectiveness but are grounded within a normative and value-based system. One of the most significant findings of this study is the central role of ethics and spirituality in regulating other dimensions of family life. Whereas many modern approaches assess quality of life through material or psychological indicators, Nahj al-Balagha directly links it to the degree of commitment to ethical values. In addition, child upbringing emerges as a key factor in sustaining family quality of life. The emphasis on early education and the transmission of values reflects the function of the family as a system of cultural reproduction. This finding underscores the long-term and formative role of upbringing in shaping the quality and stability of family life.

Family psychological tranquility is identified as another essential dimension. Concepts such as patience, contentment, and anger control indicate that psychological balance is achieved not through the elimination of tension but through its management. This perspective highlights emotional regulation as a central mechanism for maintaining stability within the family.

Finally, the findings related to social responsibility demonstrate that the family in Nahj al-Balagha is not an isolated unit but is actively engaged with the broader social environment. Emphasis on supporting the oppressed, assisting those in need, and maintaining kinship ties indicates that family quality of life is shaped through interaction with the social context. This is consistent with family quality of life frameworks in which social relationships are considered key indicators (Brown et al., 2006).

Conclusion

By presenting comprehensive teachings on ethics, education, and human relationships, Nahj al-Balagha demonstrates a substantial capacity for articulating a coherent model of family quality of life. The model developed in this study, grounded directly in the text, highlights the centrality of ethics and spirituality as the organizing core of family life, alongside interconnected dimensions related to relationships, upbringing, psychological stability, and social responsibility. This

model provides a culturally grounded and text-based framework that may serve as a foundation for future theoretical and applied research in the field of family studies, as well as for policy development related to the Islamic family.

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