

Received: 22/01/2024

Accepted: 17/04/2024

**Keywords:**

The multilevel engagement theory, functions of theory, family, culture, diversity

**DOI:**

<https://doi.org/10.17868/strath.00088900>

## Original Research Article

# The functions of the multilevel engagement theory

**Muhammad Hassan Raza**

### Abstract:

This article presents five specific functions of the multilevel engagement theory, which include descriptive, sensitising, integrative, explanatory, and value functions. The multilevel engagement theory considers culture and diversity as central aspects to understanding and explaining family relationships and functioning in societies around the world. The author provides specific examples of the course assignments from his graduate-level course that he taught in two different semesters to demonstrate how the multilevel engagement theory contains and serves these five functions. Additionally, the author uses secondary data from a nationally representative survey to provide empirical evidence and show the application of the multilevel engagement theory. The results show that the multilevel engagement theory effectively serves five important functions by organising and classifying a phenomenon (descriptive), drawing researchers' attention and consciousness to relevant phenomena (sensitising), integrating various pieces of information (integrative), predicting and explaining the relationship between concepts and variables (explanatory), and demonstrating its value in conducting research and describing real-life situations (value). Given the growing diversity and cultural plurality among individuals, couples, and families around the world, the multilevel engagement theory provides researchers and other audiences with an important theoretical lens to conduct research, understand relevant phenomena, and explain real-life situations.



## Introduction

This article presents five specific functions of the Multilevel Engagement Theory (MET; Raza, 2023a, 2024). These functions include descriptive, sensitising, integrative, explanatory, and value functions (Knapp, 2009; Smith & Hamon, 2022; White et al., 2019). The MET offers a multilevel and inclusive theoretical framework, which consists of interrelated ideas and concepts, such as family, culture, and diversity (Raza, 2023a). The author defines a theory as follows: A theory is a conceptual framework of interrelated concepts, terms, and ideas, which are grounded in certain assumptions and inform specific propositions to conduct research, understand relevant phenomena, and explain real-life situations (Raza, 2024).

The MET considers culture and diversity as the central aspects to understanding and explaining family relationships, experiences, and the functioning of individuals, couples, families, and groups in societies globally (Raza, 2023a). Research shows that cultural and family diversity are increasing among contemporary families, such as two-parent families, single-parent families, stepfamilies, foster care families, same-sex families, and immigrant families (Mendenhall et al., 2019; Smart Stepfamilies, 2021). Consequently, family structures, relationships, and dynamics are becoming quite complex and multifaceted in today's societies (Olson et al., 2021; Raza, 2018a; United States Census, 2022). Family, culture, and diversity have become fundamental aspects in shaping the relationships and experiences of individuals, families, and groups over time (McCarthy, 2021; Raza et al., 2023b).

Public health issues, such as health disparities, mental health problems, child abuse and neglect, suicides, aging, unmet need for contraception, and intimate partner violence are growing in contemporary societies around the world, including the United States (Feinberg et al., 2021; Henry et al., 2020; Pfund et al., 2023). During the recent COVID pandemic, the prevalence of disease, individuals' experiences and functioning varied with respect to different areas of diversity, such as ethnicity, gender, education, socioeconomic status, and age (Frisco et al., 2022). It also affected students in many ways, such as increased stress levels, distance learning, lack of social interactions, lower prevention and therapeutic health services, disruption to education, reduced financial resources, and unemployment (Akturan et al., 2023; Kibbey et al., 2021; McCurdy et al., 2023; Mersky et al., 2020). Families, groups, and organisations are still experiencing post-COVID effects (Meenakshi et al., 2023). For instance, people are dealing with increasing mental health and financial problems. Additionally, in the current post-COVID period, people's attitudes and perceptions towards COVID vary due to several factors, such as race, ethnicity, and fear of getting COVID, which impact upon whether they are vaccinated or not (Andersen et al., 2023; Karatürk & Güneş, 2023; Schnepf, 2022; Wu et al., 2023).



As mentioned above, intimate partner violence (IPV) is one of the serious public health issues worldwide. Research shows that one in three women have experienced intimate partner violence (UN Women, 2023). In Pakistan, the prevalence of intimate partner violence is similar as it stands at almost 29% (Raza et al., 2023). Due to the patriarchal nature of Pakistani society, women have less access to the social, political, and social domains of society than men. Also, family norms limit women's voices and access to IPV services when they experience any form of IPV. Hence, they are less likely to report IPV, which makes it underpromoted (Raza et al., 2023). Moreover, more than half of the Pakistani population (61%) live in rural areas, with about 39% residing in urban areas (National Institute of Population Studies Pakistan, 2023). Although there are similarities across the country in terms of religion, annual festivals, and traditions, rural and urban families also have their own unique cultures, such as local language, family practices, caste, and local customs and traditions, which shape their family relationships and functioning. Hence, the current sample includes women from both urban and rural areas of Pakistan.

Past and present situations illustrate that individuals and families have unique needs and experiences related to their belonging to different cultures and areas of diversity. They also face different degrees of vulnerabilities and resources associated with their cultures and areas of diversity (Raza, 2023). Therefore, it is essential to consider culture and diversity as the central aspects for understanding the experiences and functioning of individuals, couples, and families, to adequately examine and address their distinct needs in different domains of their lives, such as family, school, community, and health services. Hence, a multilevel, inclusive, and culturally relevant conceptual framework like the MET, which considers culture and diversity as the central aspects to the understanding of family relationships and functioning, is imperative. Such a multilevel framework may help us to adequately understand the complex relationships and dynamic experiences of contemporary families in diverse societies around the world. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to discuss the functions of the MET with specific examples to demonstrate its use and application in theory and research for different groups of audience including students, instructors, and researchers.

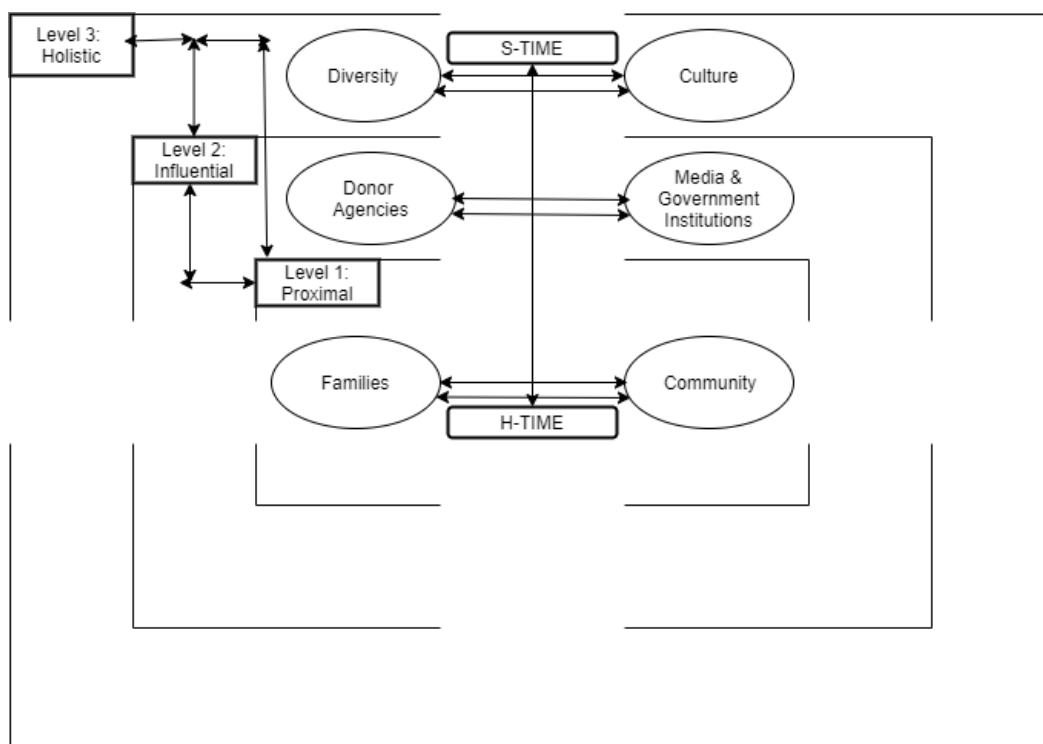
## **The multilevel engagement theory (MET)**

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the MET. According to this theory, 1) There are three engagement levels (proximal, influential, and holistic) of the MET; 2) Individuals, families, groups, and organisations are situated at each of the engagement levels. For instance, at the proximal level, families, support groups, schools, community-based organisations/agencies, friends, peers, etc., are situated. At the influential level, donor/funding agencies, media (e.g., newspapers, magazines, radio, television, social media, internet, etc.), and public state/federal institutions are situated. At the holistic level, the areas of



diversity, such as gender, ethnicity, race, class, disability, language, religion, sexual orientation, immigration, place of residence, and culture are situated; 3) Individuals, families, groups, and organisations within and between the engagement levels have reciprocal relationships with each other. For instance, families living at the proximal level have reciprocal relationships with other individuals, families, groups, and organisations situated at the same as well as different engagement levels; 4) Individuals, families, groups, and organisations which are located at the influential level and the holistic level also have reciprocal relationships with individuals, families, groups, and organisations within and between the engagement levels; 5) The three engagement levels also have reciprocal relationships with each other; 6) The dynamics of individuals, families, groups, and organisations and their reciprocal relationships with each other within and between the engagement levels (i.e., the proximal, influential, and holistic levels) change over time and are influenced by developmental, sociocultural and historical contexts. To review additional details about the MET, please see Raza (2023a).

**Figure 1 The Multilevel Engagement Theory**



Note: S-TIME = Sociocultural time; H-TIME = Historical Time



## Method

To support how the MET contains and serves five specific functions (descriptive, sensitising, integrative, explanatory, and value functions) of a theory, which are also prevalent in contemporary theories used in mainstream research, the author shared evidence of students' assignments from his graduate level course (spring 2023 and summer 2023). The author has been teaching this class for several years in a large-scale public university located in the Midwest United States. The course focuses on major contemporary theories and current research in the area of family science and human development. Since family science and human development is an interdisciplinary area, students also consider research from other disciplines, and the theories they learn about are also used in other disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, child life, counselling, and social work.

For each theory, the author recorded three different videos to demonstrate the use and application of this theory in research, real-life situations, and personal experiences. There was a specific learning objective or purpose behind each video. For instance, during a video to introduce the fundamental ideas of the theory, such as its main assumptions, concepts, and potential proposition, the author explained how these different components of a theory are related to and support each other. A second video was recorded and shared with students to demonstrate the use of theory in conducting research with different methodologies, such as qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. In this video, the author showed how a theory can be used to drive and develop different research questions and hypotheses, how the propositions of a theory can be empirically tested in research that can further inform or highlight any revisions, empirical validity, and/or potential gaps, and how qualitative themes can be developed deductively by using a theory as a conceptual framework. Similarly, a third video was recorded and shared to demonstrate the use and application of theories with respect to real-life situations and personal experiences. For instance, how a theory helps researchers and other groups of audiences to understand, describe, organise, and explain real-life situations, and how one theory can provide a specific lens through which researchers can interpret and make sense of a phenomenon. Moreover, the author created three different assignments for students to assess their understanding on the use and application of each theory that they learned about in this course, including the MET. These assignments included the real-life application of theories, theories and personal experiences, and final theory presentation and reflection. Hence, students completed three assignments in which they used and applied the MET. The author created and provided specific rubrics for each of these assignments.

For the real-life application of theories assignment, students chose a video clip (e.g., movie, song, show, cartoon, etc.) and used the MET as a theoretical lens to explain the situation presented in that video clip. This assignment shows a real-life application of the MET. After reading about the theory and reviewing the



lecture videos, students choose two specific concepts from the MET, introduced the video clip, described the theory's concepts, used the concepts to explain the video clip, discussed the relevance of those concepts with respect to the situation presented in the video clip, and discussed the relationship between those two concepts. Students also shared their reflections at the end of their assignment in terms of what new and unique knowledge they gained from this overall assignment.

In the second assignment reflecting on theories and personal experiences, students used the MET as a lens reflecting upon their personal experiences based on the prompts provided by the instructor and describing their personal experiences. Students shared how the theory helped them to acknowledge and recognise those life events and processes and the linkages between them that they had not previously considered. Students discussed the reasons and factors which were associated with their personal situations and experiences. Hence, students used the MET to understand, explain, and reflect on their personal experiences.

The third assignment related to theory presentation and reflection provided students with an opportunity to bring together all the pieces that they learned throughout the semester and share them in their presentation of and reflection on the theory. In this assignment, students used the MET, described its components and functions, the relevance of theory in understanding today's families, relationships between the concepts and different components of the theory, and the application of the MET to research and real-life situations. Since the author did not collect any direct/primary data from the students, no approval was required from the institutional review board (IRB) to conduct this study. A brief description of each assignment is provided in the appendices (A, B, and C).

Additionally, the author used secondary data from a nationally representative survey called 'The Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey' to provide empirical evidence regarding the five functions of the MET. This survey was conducted in 2012-13 and consisted of 13,568 never-married women who were aged between 15-49 years. A subsample consisting of 3,545 currently married women was selected for the current study. These women were randomly selected for an interview on intimate partner violence. Since the data was secondary and publicly available, no IRB approval was required for conducting the analysis and including it in this paper.

## Results

This section discusses students' assignments and presents the findings based on a nationally representative dataset to demonstrate the use and application of five specific functions of the MET. The first descriptive function of a theory helps researchers to organise and describe research findings and real-life situations (Knapp, 2009; Smith & Hamon, 2022). In the statements below, students used



two specific concepts of the MET, organised a real-life situation which was presented in a video clip, and used those two concepts to describe that situation. One student chose two concepts (culture and community) from the MET and selected the opening theme song from 'Molly of Denali Show'. After defining the two concepts, the student used the first concept of community to organise and describe the situation presented in the video clip 'We can see community in this clip because Molly clearly lives in a community. Molly lives in Alaska with her family, friends, and neighbours, and they all embrace the Alaskan lifestyle. Molly and her friends participate in Alaskan outdoor activities, such as dog sledding.'

The student then used the second concept of culture, and organised and described the situation presented in the video clip:

The second concept I chose for this discussion is culture. We can definitely see Alaskan culture in this clip. Molly of Denali embraces Alaskan culture. This includes the way they dress in their warm winter clothes, or outdoor appropriate outfits. As mentioned above, we can all see their love for the outdoors, which is something very important in the Alaskan culture. Alaska also has a culture of being adventurous and this is definitely seen in Molly of Denali.

After describing both concepts, the student discussed the relevance of these concepts with respect to the situation presented in the video clip and the relationship between these two concepts and the video clip: 'Community and culture are related to each other because often in a community, there is a similar culture that is involved. I can think of many communities that have a particular culture. Molly's community, shows a particular Alaskan culture.' At the end, the student reflected upon the learning based on the assignment:

What I learned from this assignment is that community and culture go hand in hand with each other. Communities all have a culture, and I also think that certain cultures can create a community. I learned that it's important for communities to have cultures because it brings people together.

The above evidence illustrates how the MET helped the student to organise, name, classify, and describe a real-life situation in a clear and meaningful way, which is the descriptive function.

The second function of a theory is a sensitising one, which draws researchers' and other audiences' attention to and fosters their awareness and consciousness about relevant phenomena. The MET considers culture and diversity as the central aspects for understanding and explaining the experiences of contemporary families in societies around the world (Raza, 2023a). It highlights the importance of culture and diversity as the central aspects for learning about and studying families in an inclusive manner, which makes researchers and



other audiences more sensitive to and conscious of the role of culture and diversity in family relationships and functioning among contemporary families globally. It also draws researchers' attention to and fosters their awareness and consciousness of family relationships and functioning as a multifaceted, complex, and multilevel phenomenon.

In what follows I share statements from students' theory and personal experience assignments, which illustrate how the MET made students more aware and conscious of their family relationships, uncovering insightful information that they hadn't previously considered, through a reflective process:

I would say that my family experiences resources from all engagement levels. My family is involved in the proximal level because we are in schools (all private schools to be specific), and we participate in non-government activities in our local synagogue. My family is involved in the influential level. Many of us have social media accounts, and of course we utilize the internet. And my family is involved at the holistic level because we are a part of a different culture.

This student's statement illustrates how the MET increased their consciousness, thinking, and awareness around their experiences with respect to the three engagement levels, which provided them with an opportunity to differentiate their experiences, think critically and deeply about them, and become more critical, reflective, and sensitive in examining, uncovering, and explaining these complex experiences. Another student discussed how the MET provides them and others with an opportunity to examine, understand, and sensitise on family dynamics:

This theory has many different parts and pieces, and I feel like it can be applied to many situations. What's important about this theory is that it can explain a lot for family functioning systems. This theory can also provide us with a better foundation for understanding families.

The third function of a theory is the integrative function, which helps and guides researchers and other audiences to connect various distinct pieces of information to make sense of them. It is worth mentioning that these pieces can be distinct but simultaneously related to each other. The MET also connects different concepts, variables, qualitative themes, and research findings for the purpose of studying and describing them before the audience. The following hypothesis demonstrates how the theory connects its different concepts: 'Family relationships and functioning are influenced by their reciprocal relationships with individuals, families, groups, and organizations within and between the engagement levels' (Raza, 2023, p.233). Hence, the MET serves an integrative function by offering a multilevel understanding of the relationships and functioning among individuals, groups, and organisations, both within and





between the engagement levels, and how these reciprocal relationships change over time, and are influenced by developmental, sociocultural, and historical contexts.

A student described the integrative function of the MET: 'The integrative function of the MET helps us understand and make connections between multilevel influences, sociocultural, and historical contexts in our understanding of complex human interactions in individuals, group, and family situations.' As is evident from the statement above, this theory helps researchers and others to connect different pieces together through the three engagement levels (proximal, influential, and holistic levels), sociocultural, and historical contexts to better understand and describe the interactions and relationships between individuals, families, and groups in different domains of life, including within family situations.

The fourth function of a theory is the explanatory function, which helps researchers to explain their data and/or research findings. The MET not only helps researchers to explain their data and variables, but also helps them to understand and explain the research findings of qualitative research and themes. For instance, in qualitative research, researchers collect data from respondents with respect to their experiences, opinions, and/or perceptions. The goal of researchers is to understand respondents' subjective experiences and explain them to the audience in a more objective manner. Hence, the MET provides researchers and others with a lens for explaining the themes/findings of qualitative studies. By explaining the findings and the relationships between variables and themes, the researchers discover answers to their research questions.

Additionally, the explanatory function helps researchers to make predictions by developing hypotheses. The following hypothesis demonstrates the association between different concepts of the MET:

Families contain and experience resources and vulnerabilities from each of the engagement levels. Hence, those families who gain new resources and/or strengthen existing resources and decrease existing vulnerabilities, and/or prevent from new potential vulnerabilities experience healthy family relationships and functioning over time.' (Raza, 2023, p.233)

The above hypothesis, which is informed by the MET, offers a prediction about the family. For instance, if families strengthen their existing resources and gain new resources, simultaneously decreasing existing vulnerabilities, and/or preventing new potential vulnerabilities, those families are more likely to experience healthy family relationships and functioning over time compared to their counterparts. Hence, the MET serves the explanatory function of a theory by explaining data and research findings, and making predictions about the



relationships between variables, concepts, and themes. Below is a statement from a student who explained the resources and vulnerabilities that they experienced at the three engagement levels.

The fifth function of a theory is the value function. This function shows that a theory is important and valuable because it helps researchers and others to understand and explain various relevant phenomena and make sense of the world. Since research and theory inform each other, theory plays an integral part in empirical research and vice versa. The process of creating scientific knowledge through induction and deduction shows the interplay of theory and research (Raza, 2021, 2022; Remler & Van Ryzin, 2022). Hence, a theory has a value, and is integral for research. The MET is also valuable and useful because it provides a multilevel understanding of family relationships and functioning with respect to the three engagement levels along with developmental, sociocultural, and historical contexts. This theory has additional value given the current diverse society because it considers culture and diversity as the central aspects to the understanding of family relationships and functioning. Therefore, the MET serves the value function by providing a multilevel understanding of complex and multifaceted family relationships and functioning among individuals, families, groups, and organisations within and between the engagement levels, and how these reciprocal relationships change over time, and are influenced by developmental, sociocultural, and historical contexts.

A student described the value function of the MET as: 'The value function of the multilevel engagement theory posits that culture and diversity are central to understanding families. It values diversity and believes it is healthy and positive in a society.' This statement shows that the MET makes a unique contribution and addresses immediate needs in the area of theory and research, through considering culture and diversity as central and positive aspects for understanding family relationships and functioning, because diverse families are increasingly emerging globally.

Similarly, the following student's statement shows the value of the MET for contemporary families and research:

I think it is fascinating how so many different aspects of life can have such an impact on an individual and their families. I also learned to take a step back and review my own life and experiences to see how it all fits into this one theory.

Another student shared the utility and value of the MET not only with respect to class learning but also in real-life and practical family situations:

This assignment was a great time and topic of reflection. I enjoyed getting to read and understand the multilevel engagement theory in a deeper manner. I got a much better understanding of it now. I also enjoyed



getting to delve deeper into my own personal vulnerabilities and view them as just that, a vulnerability. I have not ever taken time to realize how my mental state has truly affected my family relationships. I hope to take what I have learned in this class and apply it in my family life, classroom, and marriage.

Another emphasised the value of the MET due to the changing nature and dynamics of current society:

I truly believe that the next few years will be extremely important historically as the political climate of the US must experience extreme overhaul in order to support and provide resources for all of the individuals in our greater society. I think that this theory is an extremely apt framework for assessing families within these shifting times.

The above evidence demonstrates the use and application of five specific functions of the MET.

With respect to secondary data, preliminary analysis was carried out to check the reliability of scales, descriptive statistics (e.g., mean, standard deviation), and correlations. The scales of physical violence (6 items scale;  $\alpha = .78$ ) controlling behaviour (5 items scale;  $\alpha = .72$ ), and women's empowerment (4 items scale;  $\alpha = .91$ ) were valid and reliable. Multiple regression was used to analyse the relationships between independent and dependent variables. Variables were modelled into four models separately for urban and rural women each for physical violence and controlling behaviour.

Independent variables from the proximal level of the MET were included in the analysis, which includes women's empowerment and fear of their husband. The dependent variables were also from the proximal level, such as physical violence and controlling behaviour. One variable (media) was included from the influential level (frequency of watching television), and two variables were included from the holistic level related to diversity, which were women's education and the family's wealth. Rural and urban variables showed the sociocultural context of Pakistani society. Time was not measured and included in the analysis. Two variables (women's current age and husband's education) were controlled for the analysis.

The results of the fourth and final model for rural and urban samples, each for physical violence and controlling behaviour, are discussed in this section. A detailed analysis can be found in Appendices D and E. The results show that women's empowerment is positively associated with physical violence for urban women, but it is not a significant factor for rural women. Women's fear of their husband has a positive relationship with physical violence for both urban and rural women, which implies that those women who are usually afraid of their husbands are at a higher risk of experiencing physical violence regardless of



their place of residence. Frequency of watching television is a significant factor for decreasing physical violence for urban women. Women's education was also negatively associated with physical violence for urban women.

With respect to controlling behaviour, women's empowerment was negatively associated with their husband's controlling behaviour, and this was also statistically significant for rural women. Women's fear of their husband was positively related with controlling behaviour for both urban and rural women. Frequency of watch TV was negatively associated with controlling behaviour for urban women. Women's education was negatively associated with controlling behaviour for rural women. Wealth was not associated with controlling behaviour.

## Discussion

The purpose of this paper is to present five specific functions of the MET that this theory contains and serves to provide appropriate empirical evidence to support it. These functions include descriptive, sensitising, integrative, explanatory, and value functions (Knapp, 2009; Smith & Hamon, 2022). The author has presented specific examples and empirical evidence to demonstrate how the MET contains and serves these five functions of a scientific theory. The MET helps researchers and others to name, classify, organise, and describe any relevant phenomenon, additionally raising awareness, sensitivity, and consciousness of any hidden or insightful events, situations, and processes related to relevant phenomena. It further guides researchers and others to put different pieces together and describe them in a meaningful way. The theory serves the explanatory function by explaining data, themes, and study findings, and through informing testable hypotheses (predicting the relationship between concepts and variables). It has value because it considers culture and diversity as the central aspects for understanding family relationships and the functioning of contemporary families in societies around the world, which helps to adequately understand and explain people's experience. Therefore, the MET contains and serves five important functions, which are also prevalent in contemporary theories used in mainstream research (Smith & Hamon, 2022; White et al., 2019). It is worth mentioning that although the MET stands beside other contemporary theories in terms of serving these five functions, it also has a unique stance as it considers culture and diversity to be the central aspects in understanding family relationship and functioning in societies around the world (Raza, 2023a).

With respect to secondary data analysis on intimate partner violence, the results are critically discussed as follows to demonstrate the empirical evidence and application of the five functions of the MET. First, the MET guided the selection and organisation of variables, which demonstrates the descriptive function of this theory. As discussed above the theory serves the descriptive function in qualitative research by offering themes and describing qualitative data. The



results showed that there are some differences as well as similarities between urban and rural women in terms of factors associated with either increasing or decreasing intimate partner violence, including physical violence and controlling behaviour. For instance, frequency of watching television was a significant factor for decreasing physical violence and controlling behaviour only for urban women, whereas women's fear of their husbands increased intimate partner violence for both urban and rural women. Women's empowerment was positively associated with physical violence for urban women, but it was negatively associated with controlling behaviour for rural women. Women's education decreased their husband's controlling behaviour for rural women and physical violence for urban women. The results showed that all three levels (the proximal, influential, and holistic) of the MET are critical in shaping women's experiences of intimate partner violence in Pakistani society. Second, the MET uncovered insightful information about the complex and dynamic experiences of intimate partner violence for women who reside in both urban and rural areas of Pakistan, which is the sensitising function of this theory. Third, the variables were combined into different models, which were informed by the MET. Therefore, the theory helped the researcher to combine, organise, and integrate different pieces/variables for the current research study and analysis. Fourth, the researcher used the MET to explain the aforementioned results, which serves as the explanatory function of this theory. Finally, the entire process of research which is grounded and informed by this theory demonstrates its value and utility in empirical research, which serves the value function of this theory.

Given growing public health issues, such as health disparities, mental health problems, child abuse and neglect, suicides, aging, and intimate partner violence in contemporary societies globally (Feinberg et al., 2021; Henry et al., 2020; Pfund et al., 2023), a multilevel, inclusive, and culturally responsive theory like the MET is needed to adequately understand the unique needs and experiences of diverse individuals and families, which may help researchers and practitioners to effectively work with them and address these needs. Research grounded in or informed by the MET may also provide appropriate guidelines for policy makers to effectively develop policies which are inclusive and represent the needs and experiences of diverse individuals and families. Recent research showed that during the COVID pandemic, the prevalence of disease, individuals' experiences, and functioning varied based on their gender, ethnicity, educational levels, socioeconomic status, age, etc. (Frisco et al., 2022). The COVID pandemic also affected students of different backgrounds who belonged to various areas of diversity, such as race, ethnicity, culture, income, disability, etc. in many unique and different ways by increasing distance learning, lacking social interactions, lowering prevention and therapeutic health services, disrupting education, reducing financial resources, increasing unemployment, which also increased their stress levels (Akturan et al., 2023; Kibbey et al., 2021; McCurdy et al., 2023; Mersky et al., 2020).



Individuals, families, groups, and organisations are still experiencing post-COVID effects differently due to their unique backgrounds and areas of diversity (Meenakshi et al., 2023). For instance, people are dealing with increasing mental health and financial problems (Henry et al., 2020). Additionally, in the current post COVID period, peoples' attitudes and perceptions towards COVID vary due to several factors, such as race, ethnicity, fear of getting COVID, which determines whether they are vaccinated or not (Andersen et al., 2023; Karatürk & Güneş, 2023; Schnepf, 2022; Wu et al., 2023). This evidence indicates that the experiences and needs of individuals and families in contemporary societies are complex and multifaceted. Therefore, it is essential for researchers to study multilevel influences on the lives of these individuals and families to adequately understand their challenges, experiences, and needs. Hence, an inclusive and multilevel conceptual framework like the MET can help researchers to examine diverse individuals and families in a more comprehensive and holistic way.

In Pakistani society, patriarchal systems are still prevalent and functioning, which favour men more than women. Consequently, women face inequalities in their relationships with men in different domains of society, and particularly in the family. These disparities allow men to carry out aggressive and violent acts against women in the family. Due to diverse culture and growing diversity in urban and rural areas of Pakistan, women's experiences of IPV substantially vary. Consequently, there are similarities and differences in resources/support and vulnerabilities/risk, which can increase or decrease IPV for these women. Hence, more specific and multilevel programs are needed to support these women and decrease IPV in Pakistan and globally.

In sum, the results of the current study illustrate how the MET contains and successfully serves its five specific functions and makes a unique contribution in the areas of research and theory by considering culture and diversity as the central aspects for understanding family relationships and functioning around the world. It is worth mentioning that because the MET was developed by a diverse scholar, it may face challenges in becoming part of mainstream theories and research.

### **Implications for policy and practice**

The current study, based on secondary data analysis, provides important guidelines for policy and practice in Pakistan. First, because women are the ones who raise and nurture children and spend most of the time with them in the family, when they experience intimate partner violence it can affect how they raise and socialise their children. Hence, effective policies and programs need to be developed and targeted towards women, particularly those who have young children. Second, according to the current findings, women's experiences of IPV vary between urban and rural areas, such that policies and programs need to be contextualised to ensure successful outcomes and sustainability. Finally, women's fear of their husbands was one of the vital factors in the study which



increased IPV for both rural and urban women, hence, policies and programs need to target and include husbands, which may help to substantially reduce IPV in Pakistan.

### Limitations and future studies

There are a few limitations of the current study. First, a secondary dataset was used to demonstrate the application of five functions of the MET, which limited the researcher's ability to measure the constructs of the theory directly and to include them in the study. Second, the researcher taught the course himself, which might have created a bias among students to complete their assignments on his theory. The empirical testing of the theory is in its initial stage and additional testing with different groups in diverse societies globally is needed.

Future studies will focus on collecting and using primary quantitative and qualitative data. The researcher will also conduct qualitative studies to gain an in-depth understanding of the theory and its application in research and real-life situations. Complex research designs, such as mixed-methods and longitudinal research designs, will be used to test the theory with participants over time. Research will also be conducted with diverse groups of the population to examine the generalisability of the MET.

### Conclusion

The current paper presents the application of five specific functions of the MET, which include descriptive, sensitising, integrative, explanatory, and value functions. The researcher provided empirical evidence to demonstrate how the theory contains and serves its five functions by including nationally representative data and sharing graduate-level course assignments. The results showed that the MET effectively serves five specific functions to conduct research, understand relevant phenomena, and explain real-life situations. Despite the limitations, the paper provides essential information on the use and application of the MET for research and scholarship.

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## Declarations

The author reports that there are no competing interests to declare for this paper.

No funding or grants were received to conduct this research.

The author did not collect any primary data from participants. Therefore, no IRB approval was required from Missouri State University.



## About the author

Dr. Raza is an Associate Professor at Missouri State University, Springfield, United States. He is a theorist and a methodologist. He is the creator of the Multilevel Engagement Theory, the Multilevel Community Engagement Model, and the MCEM Framework. He is the author of *The Multilevel Community Engagement Model: School, Community, Workplace Engagement and Service-Learning* and *Two Souls One Reflection*.

## Appendix A

### Real-life application of theories: The multilevel engagement theory

1. Find a video clip (e.g., movie, T.V. show, song, cartoon) and explain that video clip by using two concepts of the multilevel engagement theory. Upload the video clip or share a direct link to the video along with your initial response. If the video clip is long, then identify the time and situation of the video that you explained by using the concepts of the multilevel engagement theory. Provide a description of the video clip you choose in your response to the first discussion question.
2. Describe the two concepts of the multilevel engagement theory that you chose for this discussion.
3. Use the first concept to explain the situation presented in the video clip.
4. Use the second concept to explain the situation presented in the video clip.
5. Discuss how the concepts you chose are related to each other, why did you choose them, and how did they best explain the video clip compared to the other concepts that you did not select?
6. What did you learn from this assignment?



## Appendix B

### Theories and personal experiences: The multilevel engagement theory

1. Briefly describe the multilevel engagement theory. What resources and vulnerabilities do you experience at the individual, couple, and family levels?
2. Which of the engagement levels do you experience these resources and vulnerabilities from? How?
3. How do these resources and vulnerabilities affect your family relationships and functioning?
4. How have these resources and vulnerabilities and their effects on your family relationships changed over time and been affected by sociocultural and historical times?
5. What did you learn from this assignment?



## Appendix C

### **Theory presentation and reflection: The multilevel engagement theory**

1. Describe at least two assumptions, two concepts, and two functions of the theory.
2. Explain the linkages between the concepts and assumptions.
3. Discuss relevant research and the theory's application to research, with references.
4. Apply the concepts to real-life situations with specific examples.
5. Discuss your personal experience with respect to the theory's application.
6. Use visual aids (e.g., flowcharts, graphs, tables, pictures etc.) to effectively demonstrate the theory, its application to research, real-life situations, and your personal experiences.
7. Provide your overall reflection on the theory and its application in research and real-life situations.
8. What did you learn from this assignment? Provide a precise conclusion of the assignment.
9. Review two other classmates' presentations and provide them with your constructive, critical, and descriptive feedback.
10. Include complete references.



## Appendix D

**Table 1: Multiple Regression for Physical Violence (N, 3,545)**

| Models       | Variables               | B      | SE    | $\beta$ | t      | p     | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
|--------------|-------------------------|--------|-------|---------|--------|-------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Urban</b> |                         |        |       |         |        |       |             |             |
| Model 1      | (Constant)              | 7.499  | 0.239 |         | 31.344 | 0.001 | 7.030       | 7.968       |
|              | Women current age       | 0.003  | 0.007 | 0.013   | 0.521  | 0.603 | -0.009      | 0.016       |
|              | Husband education       | -0.076 | 0.010 | -0.190  | -7.797 | 0.001 | -0.095      | -0.057      |
| Model 2      | (Constant)              | 6.518  | 0.256 |         | 25.485 | 0.001 | 6.016       | 7.019       |
|              | Women current age       | -0.001 | 0.007 | -0.005  | -0.201 | 0.840 | -0.015      | 0.012       |
|              | Husband education       | -0.060 | 0.009 | -0.150  | -6.376 | 0.001 | -0.078      | -0.041      |
|              | Women empowerment       | 0.020  | 0.009 | 0.057   | 2.283  | 0.023 | 0.003       | 0.037       |
|              | Women's fear of husband | 1.273  | 0.103 | 0.290   | 12.306 | 0.001 | 1.070       | 1.476       |
| Model 3      | (Constant)              | 6.740  | 0.264 |         | 25.490 | 0.001 | 6.222       | 7.259       |
|              | Women current age       | -0.002 | 0.007 | -0.008  | -0.314 | 0.754 | -0.015      | 0.011       |
|              | Husband education       | -0.053 | 0.010 | -0.133  | -5.560 | 0.001 | -0.072      | -0.034      |
|              | Women empowerment       | 0.024  | 0.009 | 0.067   | 2.665  | 0.008 | 0.006       | 0.041       |
|              | Women's fear of husband | 1.264  | 0.103 | 0.288   | 12.245 | 0.001 | 1.062       | 1.466       |



|              |                          |        |       |        |        |       |        |        |
|--------------|--------------------------|--------|-------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|
|              | Frequency of watching TV | -0.142 | 0.045 | -0.076 | -3.187 | 0.001 | -0.230 | -0.055 |
| Model 4      | (Constant)               | 6.785  | 0.292 |        | 23.249 | 0.001 | 6.213  | 7.358  |
|              | Women current age        | -0.004 | 0.007 | -0.015 | -0.601 | 0.548 | -0.018 | 0.009  |
|              | Husband education        | -0.038 | 0.012 | -0.096 | -3.291 | 0.001 | -0.061 | -0.015 |
|              | Women empowerment        | 0.025  | 0.009 | 0.071  | 2.812  | 0.005 | 0.008  | 0.042  |
|              | Women's fear of husband  | 1.223  | 0.105 | 0.279  | 11.609 | 0.001 | 1.017  | 1.430  |
|              | Frequency of watching TV | -0.112 | 0.048 | -0.060 | -2.330 | 0.020 | -0.207 | -0.018 |
|              | Women Education          | -0.029 | 0.013 | -0.073 | -2.309 | 0.021 | -0.053 | -0.004 |
|              | Wealth index             | 0.000  | 0.057 | 0.000  | -0.009 | 0.993 | -0.112 | 0.111  |
| <b>Rural</b> |                          |        |       |        |        |       |        |        |
| Model 1      | (Constant)               | 6.690  | 0.273 |        | 24.500 | 0.001 | 6.154  | 7.225  |
|              | Women current age        | 0.034  | 0.008 | 0.106  | 4.521  | 0.001 | 0.020  | 0.049  |
|              | Husband education        | -0.059 | 0.013 | -0.106 | -4.547 | 0.001 | -0.084 | -0.033 |
| Model 2      | (Constant)               | 5.471  | 0.293 |        | 18.662 | 0.001 | 4.896  | 6.046  |
|              | Women current age        | 0.035  | 0.008 | 0.109  | 4.517  | 0.001 | 0.020  | 0.051  |
|              | Husband education        | -0.039 | 0.013 | -0.071 | -3.128 | 0.002 | -0.064 | -0.015 |
|              | Women empowerment        | 0.007  | 0.010 | 0.018  | 0.729  | 0.466 | -0.012 | 0.026  |





|         |                          |        |       |        |        |       |        |        |
|---------|--------------------------|--------|-------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|
|         | Women's fear of husband  | 1.559  | 0.127 | 0.278  | 12.321 | 0.001 | 1.311  | 1.807  |
| Model 3 | (Constant)               | 5.479  | 0.298 |        | 18.386 | 0.001 | 4.895  | 6.064  |
|         | Women current age        | 0.035  | 0.008 | 0.109  | 4.507  | 0.001 | 0.020  | 0.051  |
|         | Husband education        | -0.039 | 0.013 | -0.070 | -3.008 | 0.003 | -0.064 | -0.013 |
|         | Women empowerment        | 0.007  | 0.010 | 0.018  | 0.734  | 0.463 | -0.012 | 0.026  |
|         | Women's fear of husband  | 1.557  | 0.127 | 0.278  | 12.226 | 0.001 | 1.307  | 1.807  |
|         | Frequency of watching TV | -0.007 | 0.049 | -0.004 | -0.153 | 0.879 | -0.103 | 0.088  |
| Model 4 | (Constant)               | 5.495  | 0.307 |        | 17.875 | 0.001 | 4.892  | 6.097  |
|         | Women current age        | 0.032  | 0.008 | 0.098  | 3.931  | 0.001 | 0.016  | 0.048  |
|         | Husband education        | -0.035 | 0.015 | -0.063 | -2.358 | 0.018 | -0.064 | -0.006 |
|         | Women empowerment        | 0.008  | 0.010 | 0.019  | 0.774  | 0.439 | -0.012 | 0.027  |
|         | Women's fear of husband  | 1.548  | 0.129 | 0.276  | 12.038 | 0.001 | 1.296  | 1.800  |
|         | Frequency of watching TV | -0.010 | 0.053 | -0.005 | -0.184 | 0.854 | -0.114 | 0.095  |
|         | Women education          | -0.033 | 0.020 | -0.046 | -1.626 | 0.104 | -0.072 | 0.007  |
|         | Wealth index             | 0.062  | 0.067 | 0.028  | 0.916  | 0.360 | -0.070 | 0.194  |

Dependent Variable: Physical Violence  $p < .05$ .

## Appendix E



**Table 2: Multiple Regression for Controlling Behaviour (N, 3,545)**

| <b>Models</b> | <b>Variables</b>         | <b>B</b> | <b>SE</b> | <b><math>\beta</math></b> | <b>t</b> | <b>p</b> | <b>Lower Bound</b> | <b>Upper Bound</b> |
|---------------|--------------------------|----------|-----------|---------------------------|----------|----------|--------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Urban</b>  |                          |          |           |                           |          |          |                    |                    |
| Model 1       | (Constant)               | 1.042    | 0.112     |                           | 9.292    | <.001    | 0.822              | 1.262              |
|               | Women current age        | -0.008   | 0.003     | -0.062                    | -2.519   | 0.012    | -0.014             | -0.002             |
|               | Husband education        | -0.032   | 0.005     | -0.174                    | -7.043   | <.001    | -0.041             | -0.023             |
| Model 2       | (Constant)               | 0.775    | 0.121     |                           | 6.412    | <.001    | 0.538              | 1.013              |
|               | Women current age        | -0.006   | 0.003     | -0.051                    | -1.981   | 0.048    | -0.013             | 0                  |
|               | Husband education        | -0.026   | 0.004     | -0.139                    | -5.765   | <.001    | -0.034             | -0.017             |
|               | Women empowerment        | -0.004   | 0.004     | -0.027                    | -1.058   | 0.29     | -0.013             | 0.004              |
|               | Women's fear of husband  | 0.515    | 0.049     | 0.255                     | 10.531   | <.001    | 0.419              | 0.611              |
| Model 3       | (Constant)               | 0.891    | 0.125     |                           | 7.132    | <.001    | 0.646              | 1.136              |
|               | Women current age        | -0.007   | 0.003     | -0.054                    | -2.125   | 0.034    | -0.013             | -0.001             |
|               | Husband education        | -0.022   | 0.005     | -0.121                    | -4.921   | <.001    | -0.031             | -0.013             |
|               | Women empowerment        | -0.002   | 0.004     | -0.015                    | -0.587   | 0.557    | -0.011             | 0.006              |
|               | Women's fear of husband  | 0.512    | 0.049     | 0.254                     | 10.491   | <.001    | 0.416              | 0.607              |
|               | Frequency of watching TV | -0.074   | 0.021     | -0.086                    | -3.505   | <.001    | -0.116             | -0.033             |



|                          |        |       |        |        |       |        |        |
|--------------------------|--------|-------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|
| Model 4 (Constant)       | 0.882  | 0.138 |        | 6.411  | <.001 | 0.612  | 1.152  |
| Women current age        | -0.007 | 0.003 | -0.057 | -2.177 | 0.03  | -0.014 | -0.001 |
| Husband education        | -0.021 | 0.005 | -0.114 | -3.8   | <.001 | -0.032 | -0.01  |
| Women empowerment        | -0.002 | 0.004 | -0.014 | -0.536 | 0.592 | -0.01  | 0.006  |
| Women's fear of husband  | 0.509  | 0.05  | 0.252  | 10.202 | <.001 | 0.411  | 0.607  |
| Frequency of watching TV | -0.072 | 0.023 | -0.084 | -3.158 | 0.002 | -0.117 | -0.027 |
| Women education          | -0.004 | 0.006 | -0.02  | -0.604 | 0.546 | -0.015 | 0.008  |
| Wealth index             | 0.006  | 0.027 | 0.007  | 0.235  | 0.814 | -0.046 | 0.059  |

**Rural**

|                         |        |       |        |        |       |        |        |
|-------------------------|--------|-------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|
| Model 1 (Constant)      | 1.05   | 0.122 |        | 8.597  | <.001 | 0.81   | 1.289  |
| Women current age       | -0.005 | 0.003 | -0.036 | -1.505 | 0.133 | -0.012 | 0.002  |
| Husband education       | -0.024 | 0.006 | -0.1   | -4.163 | <.001 | -0.035 | -0.013 |
| Model 2 (Constant)      | 0.66   | 0.13  |        | 5.09   | <.001 | 0.405  | 0.914  |
| Women current age       | 0.001  | 0.003 | 0.007  | 0.29   | 0.772 | -0.006 | 0.008  |
| Husband education       | -0.015 | 0.006 | -0.062 | -2.694 | 0.007 | -0.026 | -0.004 |
| Women empowerment       | -0.016 | 0.004 | -0.091 | -3.72  | <.001 | -0.025 | -0.008 |
| Women's fear of husband | 0.71   | 0.056 | 0.292  | 12.687 | <.001 | 0.6    | 0.82   |



|                          |        |       |        |        |       |        |        |
|--------------------------|--------|-------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|
| Model 3 (Constant)       | 0.68   | 0.132 |        | 5.168  | <.001 | 0.422  | 0.938  |
| Women current age        | 0.001  | 0.003 | 0.006  | 0.263  | 0.793 | -0.006 | 0.008  |
| Husband education        | -0.014 | 0.006 | -0.057 | -2.413 | 0.016 | -0.025 | -0.003 |
| Women empowerment        | -0.016 | 0.004 | -0.09  | -3.679 | <.001 | -0.025 | -0.007 |
| Women's fear of husband  | 0.705  | 0.056 | 0.29   | 12.518 | <.001 | 0.594  | 0.815  |
| Frequency of watching TV | -0.019 | 0.022 | -0.021 | -0.894 | 0.371 | -0.062 | 0.023  |
| Model 4 (Constant)       | 0.746  | 0.135 |        | 5.518  | <.001 | 0.481  | 1.011  |
| Women current age        | 0      | 0.004 | -0.001 | -0.05  | 0.96  | -0.007 | 0.007  |
| Husband education        | -0.006 | 0.007 | -0.027 | -0.991 | 0.322 | -0.019 | 0.006  |
| Women empowerment        | -0.016 | 0.004 | -0.091 | -3.71  | <.001 | -0.025 | -0.008 |
| Women's fear of husband  | 0.688  | 0.057 | 0.283  | 12.126 | <.001 | 0.576  | 0.799  |
| Frequency of watching TV | -0.004 | 0.024 | -0.004 | -0.148 | 0.882 | -0.05  | 0.043  |
| Women education          | -0.019 | 0.009 | -0.063 | -2.197 | 0.028 | -0.037 | -0.002 |
| Wealth index             | -0.014 | 0.03  | -0.015 | -0.479 | 0.632 | -0.073 | 0.044  |

Dependent Variable: Controlling Behaviour  
 p < .05





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ISSN 2976-9353 (Online)

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