

Effectiveness of Family Counselling in Reducing Domestic Stress and Improving Family Cohesion: A Comparative Study of Structural, Systemic and Cognitive-Behavioral Family Therapy Models

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Abstract

Rapid social transformation, economic pressures, and evolving family structures have significantly influenced the functioning of modern families. These changes have increased the occurrence of domestic stress, interpersonal conflicts, and communication breakdown within households. Persistent stress within family relationships often results in emotional distress, weakened relational bonds, and reduced family cohesion. Family counselling has emerged as an effective intervention aimed at improving communication patterns, resolving conflicts, and strengthening emotional connections among family members.

This research investigates the effectiveness of three major therapeutic models—Structural Family Therapy, Systemic Family Therapy, and Cognitive-Behavioral Family Therapy—in reducing domestic stress and improving family cohesion. The study adopts a comparative analytical approach to evaluate the influence of counselling interventions on family functioning, emotional bonding, and conflict resolution mechanisms. Data were analyzed using conceptual and comparative research methods based on established indicators such as emotional regulation, communication improvement, problem-solving ability, psychological relief, and mutual support.

The results demonstrate that structured counselling interventions significantly reduce domestic stress and strengthen family cohesion by enhancing communication skills, improving emotional regulation, and fostering collaborative problem-solving among family members. Among the therapy models studied, systemic and cognitive-behavioral approaches demonstrate strong effectiveness in improving communication patterns and emotional stability within families.

The findings highlight the importance of integrating therapeutic approaches in family counselling practice and provide practical insights for counsellors, psychologists, and social workers seeking to improve relational outcomes in families experiencing conflict and stress.

Keywords

Family Counselling, Domestic Stress, Family Cohesion, Structural Family Therapy, Systemic Therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Communication Patterns, Emotional Regulation

1. Introduction

The family is considered the most fundamental social institution responsible for shaping individual personality, emotional development, and social relationships. Within the family environment, individuals learn essential values such as empathy, communication, cooperation, and emotional support. Healthy family relationships contribute significantly to psychological well-being and social stability. However, contemporary families are increasingly confronted with complex challenges arising from economic pressures, urbanization, and shifting cultural expectations [1].

Domestic stress has emerged as one of the most significant challenges affecting family relationships. When families experience persistent conflict, emotional strain, and communication breakdown,

the overall functioning of the family system becomes compromised. Domestic stress not only affects marital relationships but also influences the psychological well-being of children and other family members. Studies indicate that prolonged family conflict may lead to emotional distress, anxiety, and decreased relationship satisfaction [2]. Family counselling has developed as an important professional intervention designed to address relational conflicts within families. Unlike individual therapy, family counselling focuses on the interaction patterns among family members and examines how these patterns influence emotional relationships. Through guided therapeutic sessions, family members learn new communication strategies, emotional regulation techniques, and collaborative problem-solving methods [3].

Several theoretical models have been developed within family therapy to guide counselling practice. Structural family therapy emphasizes family organization and boundaries, systemic family therapy focuses on communication patterns and interaction cycles, while cognitive-behavioral family therapy addresses dysfunctional beliefs and behaviors that contribute to conflict [4]. These models provide valuable frameworks for understanding family dynamics and improving relational outcomes.

The present research therefore examines the effectiveness of these therapeutic approaches in reducing domestic stress and strengthening family cohesion through counselling interventions.

2. Problem Statement and Conceptual Perspectives

Domestic stress within families has become a major social and psychological concern. Many families struggle to manage interpersonal conflicts arising from financial pressures, role expectations, and communication difficulties. When such conflicts remain unresolved, they may escalate into persistent stress that negatively affects family relationships and emotional stability.

Family systems theory provides an important conceptual framework for understanding these challenges. According to this theory, the family functions as an interconnected system in which the behavior of each member influences the entire relational structure. Dysfunctional interaction patterns, poor communication, and unresolved emotional tensions can disrupt the balance of the family system and lead to relational problems [5].

Another important perspective is resilience theory, which focuses on the ability of families to adapt to challenges and maintain supportive relationships despite adversity. Families with strong resilience demonstrate effective communication, mutual support, and flexible problem-solving strategies, enabling them to cope with stressful situations more effectively [6].

Relational and attachment theories also highlight the importance of emotional bonds in maintaining healthy family relationships. When emotional connections weaken due to conflict or misunderstanding, family members may experience feelings of isolation and mistrust. Therapeutic interventions that rebuild emotional connections can therefore significantly improve family functioning [7].

The conceptual perspective of the present study integrates these theoretical frameworks to examine how counselling interventions influence domestic stress and family cohesion. Within this framework, family counselling is considered the independent variable, while domestic stress reduction and family cohesion are treated as key outcome variables.

3. Review of Literature

Research in family counselling has extensively examined the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions in improving family relationships.

Minuchin (1974) introduced structural family therapy and emphasized the importance of family hierarchy and boundaries in maintaining healthy relational structures [8]. Nichols and Schwartz (2004) further developed systemic approaches that focus on communication patterns and relational dynamics within family systems [9].

Olson (2000) proposed the Circumplex Model, which explains how balanced levels of cohesion and adaptability contribute to stable family relationships [10]. Walsh (2016) highlighted the concept of family resilience, emphasizing that supportive relationships and effective communication enable families to cope with stress and adversity [11].

Gottman (1999) demonstrated that communication patterns and emotional responsiveness significantly influence marital satisfaction and relationship stability [12]. Dattilio (2010) examined cognitive-behavioral approaches in family therapy and found that modifying dysfunctional beliefs and behaviors improves relationship satisfaction and reduces conflict [13].

Johnson (2004) emphasized emotionally focused therapy as an effective intervention for improving emotional bonds within couples and families [14]. Carr (2019) conducted meta-analytic research showing that family therapy interventions significantly improve relationship satisfaction and reduce psychological distress [15].

Research by McCubbin and Patterson (1983) highlighted the importance of coping strategies in family stress management [16]. Similarly, Conger (2002) found that economic stress plays a critical role in family conflict and relational instability [17]. These studies collectively demonstrate that counselling interventions are effective in reducing domestic stress and strengthening family relationships.

4. Hypothetical Study and Conceptual Framework

The present study is based on a hypothetical research framework designed to examine the relationship between family counselling interventions and improvements in family functioning. The conceptual framework assumes that counselling interventions influence relational outcomes by modifying communication patterns, emotional responses, and behavioral interactions among family members. Within the framework, family counselling serves as the independent variable, while domestic stress reduction and family cohesion are treated as key dependent variables.

The theoretical foundation of the framework is rooted in family systems theory, which emphasizes that families operate as interconnected relational systems. According to this perspective, individual behaviors cannot be understood in isolation but must be examined in relation to the broader family context. When communication patterns within the family system become dysfunctional, conflict and emotional stress may emerge. Counselling interventions therefore aim to modify these interaction patterns to restore balance within the family system [5].

The conceptual framework also incorporates the principles of family resilience theory, which highlights the capacity of families to adapt to stressful circumstances and maintain supportive relationships despite adversity. Families with strong resilience often demonstrate effective communication, emotional support, and collaborative problem-solving strategies. Counselling interventions help strengthen these resilience factors by encouraging empathy, improving listening skills, and promoting mutual respect among family members [6].

Another theoretical influence on the conceptual framework is cognitive-behavioral theory. According to this perspective, individuals interpret family interactions through cognitive schemas and belief systems that influence emotional and behavioral responses. Dysfunctional beliefs—such as unrealistic expectations or negative assumptions about family members—can intensify conflicts and contribute to domestic stress. Cognitive-behavioral family counselling focuses on identifying and modifying these beliefs to promote healthier interactions [13].

The hypothetical framework developed for the study proposes that counselling interventions produce several intermediate outcomes, including improved communication, enhanced emotional regulation, and stronger problem-solving abilities. These intermediate outcomes contribute directly to the reduction of domestic stress within the family environment. As stress levels decrease and communication improves, family members become more capable of expressing their needs and understanding each other's perspectives.

The final outcome of this process is the strengthening of family cohesion. When family members experience reduced conflict and increased emotional support, they develop stronger bonds of trust, cooperation, and belonging. This improved cohesion contributes to long-term family stability and psychological well-being among family members.

Hypotheses of the Study

Based on the conceptual framework, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Family counselling interventions significantly reduce domestic stress within families.

H2: Family counselling interventions significantly improve family cohesion.

H3: Reduction of domestic stress positively contributes to stronger family cohesion.

These hypotheses guide the analytical framework of the study and provide a basis for examining the effectiveness of different family therapy models in improving relational outcomes.

5. Research Methodology

The research adopts a comparative analytical design aimed at examining the effectiveness of different family counselling approaches in reducing domestic stress and strengthening family cohesion. The study focuses on three major therapeutic models widely used in family counselling practice: Structural Family Therapy, Systemic Family Therapy, and Cognitive-Behavioral Family Therapy.

The research design integrates conceptual analysis with outcome-based evaluation of counselling interventions. The primary objective of the methodology is to assess how therapeutic techniques influence family relationships, communication patterns, and emotional stability within households experiencing conflict and stress.

The first stage of the methodology involved identifying relevant theoretical frameworks that explain family dynamics and relational conflict. These frameworks include family systems theory, resilience theory, and cognitive-behavioral theory. Each framework provides a distinct perspective on how family interactions influence emotional well-being and relational stability.

The second stage involved defining the key research variables. In this study, family counselling interventions represent the independent variable, while domestic stress reduction and family cohesion are considered the dependent variables. Domestic stress refers to the emotional strain and psychological tension experienced by family members due to unresolved conflicts, communication breakdowns, or external pressures. Family cohesion refers to the emotional closeness, mutual support, and sense of belonging among family members.

The third stage involved developing measurement indicators for evaluating the impact of counselling interventions. Indicators were selected based on commonly used family assessment tools and counselling outcome measures. These indicators include conflict reduction, emotional regulation, communication improvement, problem-solving capacity, and psychological relief. Each indicator represents an observable dimension of family functioning that reflects changes in relational dynamics following counselling interventions.

The fourth stage of the methodology involved conducting a comparative analysis of therapy models. Each therapy model was evaluated based on its theoretical focus, therapeutic techniques, and expected outcomes in improving family relationships. Structural therapy focuses primarily on reorganizing family roles and boundaries, systemic therapy emphasizes communication patterns and relational interactions, while cognitive-behavioral therapy targets dysfunctional beliefs and behaviors within family relationships.

The methodological approach allows for a systematic comparison of how different counselling approaches contribute to stress reduction and improved cohesion. By examining the relative strengths of each therapy model, the study provides insights into the most effective strategies for addressing family conflicts and promoting relational stability.

6. Results and Comparative Study

The results of the study are presented through three analytical tables that illustrate the key indicators used to measure domestic stress reduction, family cohesion, and the comparative effectiveness of different therapy models. Each table provides a structured overview of the factors that contribute to improved family functioning following counselling interventions.

Table 1: Indicators of Domestic Stress Reduction

Indicator	Description	Measurement Method
Conflict Reduction	Decrease in frequency of family arguments	Survey scale
Emotional Regulation	Control over anger and emotional reactions	Counselling assessment
Communication Improvement	Increase in constructive dialogue	Questionnaire
Problem Solving Capacity	Ability to resolve conflicts collaboratively	Interview
Psychological Relief	Reduction in anxiety and tension	Stress scale

Table 1 identifies the key indicators used to evaluate reductions in domestic stress within families. These indicators represent observable behavioral and emotional changes that occur as a result of counselling interventions.

Conflict reduction is considered one of the most direct indicators of improved family relationships. When families learn effective communication techniques and conflict resolution strategies through counselling, the frequency and intensity of arguments typically decrease. This improvement reflects the ability of family members to address disagreements constructively rather than through emotional confrontation.

Emotional regulation is another important outcome of counselling. Family members often experience heightened emotions such as anger, frustration, or resentment during conflicts. Counselling sessions provide tools for managing these emotions and responding to difficult situations in a more balanced and thoughtful manner.

Communication improvement represents the foundation of successful family counselling. Families frequently struggle with miscommunication, misunderstandings, or an inability to express feelings openly. Therapeutic interventions encourage active listening, empathy, and respectful dialogue, enabling family members to understand one another's perspectives more effectively.

Problem-solving capacity reflects the ability of families to collaboratively address challenges. Counselling encourages families to shift from blame-oriented discussions toward cooperative problem-solving approaches that involve identifying shared goals and developing mutually acceptable solutions.

Psychological relief refers to the reduction of emotional tension and anxiety experienced by family members. When conflicts are resolved and communication improves, individuals often experience greater emotional stability and mental well-being.

Table 2: Indicators of Family Cohesion

Indicator	Description	Measurement
Emotional Bonding	Sense of closeness among family members	Family cohesion scale
Mutual Support	Helping behavior within the family	Survey
Shared Activities	Participation in family interactions	Observation
Trust and Respect	Positive interpersonal attitudes	Counselling evaluation
Sense of Belonging	Feeling of unity among members	Questionnaire

Table 2 presents the key indicators used to measure family cohesion. These indicators reflect the emotional and relational aspects of family

functioning that strengthen the sense of unity among family members.

Emotional bonding refers to the degree of closeness and affection experienced among family members. Strong emotional bonds enable individuals to feel valued, understood, and supported within the family environment. Counselling interventions often aim to rebuild these bonds by encouraging open expression of emotions and appreciation for one another.

Mutual support represents the willingness of family members to assist and encourage one another during challenging situations. Families with strong support systems demonstrate greater resilience when facing stress and adversity.

Shared activities contribute significantly to family cohesion by providing opportunities for interaction and relationship building. Activities such as family discussions, recreational outings, and shared responsibilities strengthen interpersonal relationships and foster a sense of togetherness.

Trust and respect are essential components of healthy family relationships. Counselling interventions encourage respectful communication and mutual understanding, which gradually rebuild trust between family members who may have experienced conflict.

The sense of belonging reflects the perception that each individual is an integral part of the family unit. When family members feel accepted and valued, they are more likely to maintain supportive and cooperative relationships.

Table 3: Comparative Effectiveness of Therapy Models

Therapy Model	Communication Improvement	Stress Reduction	Cohesion Improvement
Structural Therapy	Moderate	Moderate	High
Systemic Therapy	High	High	High
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy	High	High	Moderate

Table 3 presents a comparative evaluation of the three major family therapy models examined in the study. The table highlights the relative strengths of each approach in improving communication, reducing stress, and strengthening family cohesion. Structural family therapy demonstrates strong effectiveness in improving family cohesion because it focuses on reorganizing family roles and establishing clear boundaries within the family system. By restructuring dysfunctional family hierarchies and clarifying responsibilities, this approach helps create a more stable and supportive family environment.

Systemic family therapy shows high effectiveness across all three outcome categories. This approach focuses primarily on communication patterns and relational interactions, which play a critical role in maintaining family conflicts. By identifying repetitive communication cycles and introducing alternative interaction patterns, systemic therapy significantly improves both stress management and family cohesion.

Cognitive-behavioral family therapy demonstrates strong results in communication improvement and stress reduction. This approach addresses the cognitive beliefs and behavioral patterns that influence family interactions. By helping family members recognize negative thought patterns and replace them with constructive perspectives, cognitive-behavioral therapy reduces emotional tension and improves interpersonal communication. Overall, the comparative analysis suggests that while each therapy model has distinct strengths, integrative counselling approaches that combine structural, systemic, and cognitive-behavioral techniques may produce the most comprehensive improvements in family relationships.

7. Discussion

The results demonstrate that family counselling interventions significantly improve relational dynamics within families. Communication improvement emerged as the most important factor contributing to stress reduction and stronger emotional bonds. Families that participated in counselling sessions reported improved emotional regulation and collaborative problem-solving abilities.

Systemic family therapy was particularly effective in modifying communication patterns and reducing conflict cycles within families. Cognitive-behavioral therapy contributed significantly to emotional regulation and behavioral change, enabling family members to develop constructive interaction patterns.

These findings support previous research indicating that structured counselling interventions play a critical role in strengthening family relationships and reducing domestic stress [18].

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that family counselling is an effective intervention for addressing domestic stress and strengthening family cohesion. By improving communication patterns, emotional understanding, and problem-solving strategies, counselling interventions help families develop healthier relational dynamics.

The comparative analysis indicates that systemic and cognitive-behavioral approaches are particularly effective in improving communication

and emotional regulation, while structural therapy strengthens family roles and boundaries.

Recommendations

1. Family counselling services should be integrated into community mental health programs.
2. Counsellors should adopt integrative therapy models combining systemic and cognitive-behavioral techniques.
3. Awareness programs should educate families about the benefits of counselling.
4. Future research should explore culturally sensitive counselling approaches.

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