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Editorial

Sustaining family and mental health in contemporary societies underscores the point that there is a troubling storm within families. To sustain a healthy family, there must be a healthy family. There is something to sustain. Studies have shown that unresolved challenges in families inevitably lead to stress and mental health issues. They analyse how unstable families lose their social and health balance, whose consequences snowball into individual, family, and societal life. Based on the challenges that confront the family, this volume devotes itself to exploring the causes, dimensions, challenges, effects, and potential panaceas to the increasing ill-health in families across different spaces.

Sajo opens this volume with a critical evaluation of how mental health could be sustained in families in contemporary times. He argues that family mental health is integral to societal well-being. Contemporary pressures demand that families actively cultivate resilience, supportive relationships, and adaptive coping mechanisms. Policymakers, religious organisations, and health institutions must partner with families to reduce stigma, provide resources, and foster environments where families thrive.

The second article by Harold examines the critical intersection between psychology and evangelicalism, drawing biblical normativity and theological resources to establish the place of Christ in the redemptive work. He avers that evangelicalism and psychology are becoming increasingly relevant and effective in helping counselees grow both spiritually and emotionally by acknowledging their Christian values and assisting them in understanding their emotional pain and social issues. The paper offers counsellors and psychologists a Christian worldview rooted in the Evangelical tradition, serving as a framework to support and guide counselees

when they bring religious experiences and concerns into therapy and counselling. Following this is Ayokunle's article, which argues that there is a connection between migration and mental health. For Ayokunle, as humans migrate from place to place, they either encounter health issues in their host communities or carry health challenges. Thus, migrants should have access to information about their health status and the places they migrate to.

On their own, Gire and Oladapo explore the complexities of family mental health and well-being in contemporary society. They argue that despite the scientific and technological advances the world has made, along with all its challenges, biblical principles remain relevant to addressing them. The vagaries of contemporary life are the subject of biblical contemplation. Audu and his colleagues conducted an empirical study to investigate the correlation between poverty and family mental health in Ayingba, central Nigeria. They argue that poverty results in social stigma, which in turn causes mental ill-health. They submit that addressing the viscerogenic needs of the family is a catalyst for sustaining family health. Irewole and Femi-Bamidele further develop this argument by asserting that the effects of poverty on a family cannot be overstated. They conclude that addressing poverty in families will lead to a healthy family life in all ramifications.

Onuchukwu argues that choosing the right marriage partner is fundamental to achieving and sustaining family mental health. A wrong spouse, he argues, would instigate stress and problems that would undermine a family's mental health. He therefore suggests that emotions and physical attractions are not the fundamental values for choosing a spouse; spiritual guidance would be needed to complement them. Bolaji and Balogun argue for the place of children in mainstreaming mental health in a family. They believe that godly children are critical assets to family mental health; thus, guiding them properly and biblically will help them to perform their designated roles in the family. Agboifo further explores the place of

children in the family and their correlation with mental health. Since dysfunctional families could produce unadjusted children, he recommends that the services of pastoral caregivers are crucial in turning the tide around. Closely knitted to Agboifo's view is Babalola's, who vigorously argued that pastoral care and counselling are all too important to maintain and sustain family mental health. Pastoral intervention in stressed families can help restore trust and love, and heal the entire family, he submitted. Ibrahim also follows this trajectory of pastoral care-giving as indispensable to addressing family challenges. He highlighted the causes of family mental health challenges and suggested that bible-based pastoral counselling can serve as a worthy intervention. Oyewole also argued along this line that family health challenges can be addressed through informed pastoral care-giving in addition to other socially approved measures. For Rhodolf, the nexus between family system theory and its implications for mental health and well-being within the Ghanaian socio-cultural context cannot be overemphasised. He advocated for a family-centred, contextually grounded approach, calling for integrated pastoral and psychosocial frameworks that reinforce family systems, mitigate stigma, and promote sustainable mental health interventions within Ghanaian society.

These articles explored critical areas of family mental health and proffer intellectual, spiritual, and practical solutions that can mitigate the challenges. While welcoming you to savour these interesting articulations of ideas, it is essential to acknowledge that the contributors are responsible for the accuracy of the ideas in their articles.

Benson O. Igboin
Editor-in-Chief

PASTORAL CARE AND COUNSELLING INTERVENTION IN SUSTAINING FAMILY MENTAL HEALTH IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

In Nigeria, the family unit faces growing emotional and psychological challenges due to cultural transitions, socio-economic instability, and the decline of traditional support systems. Amidst these dynamics, pastoral care and counselling have emerged as crucial yet underexplored resources for promoting mental well-being within families. Despite the prevalence of mental health issues, access to professional psychological services remains limited, particularly in faith-based and rural communities. This study investigates the role of pastoral care and counselling in sustaining family mental health in Nigeria. The objective is to assess how spiritual leaders provide emotional, spiritual, and psychological support to families and individuals, and to examine the impact of these interventions on mental wellness. Findings reveal that pastors and trained lay counsellors often serve as first responders to mental distress, mediators in family conflicts, and providers of guidance and referral support. Their roles foster emotional healing, stability, and resilience in families. However, challenges such as a lack of formal training, stigma, and limited collaboration with mental health professionals hinder their effectiveness. The study concludes that pastoral care and counselling are valuable tools in sustaining family mental health, particularly when integrated with professional mental health services. It recommends structured training for pastoral caregivers, policy support to legitimise and enhance their roles in community mental health frameworks, and increased collaboration with mental health practitioners.

Keywords: Pastoral Care; Family Mental Health; Counseling; Nigeria; Spiritual Support

Introduction

Family Mental Health simply implies the well-being of the family in various dimensions of life, either its psychological, emotional, or social aspects of life, which they express through their interaction and communication together with the support they render to one another, and helping one another to manage the various conflicts, stresses, travails, and challenges. This kind of relationship and the support given to one another ameliorate the difficulties encountered and alleviate their troubles, thereby fostering strong mental health within the family and enhancing a positive family environment. This, therefore, underscores the necessity of living in a good environment, which metamorphoses into a sense of euphoria in coping among family members, irrespective of the evolving dynamics that permeate the struggle of life. Hence, it highlights the stamina derived, which enables family members to demonstrate resilience in the face of difficulties and challenging times.

Pastoral counselling, which is the kind of therapy that integrates psychological principles with spiritual guidance and pastoral care (Maynard and Snodgrass 2015, 87), is usually provided within a religious context and is very useful in sustaining the mental health of the family. For instance, pastoral counseling offers emotional and spiritual supports which enable family to manage difficult situations and circumstances, such as trauma, conflict, grief, transitions, various trials, etc. also, it offers the opportunities for members of the family to express their concerns and feelings, which at the same time makes the counselors to provide guidance that is rooted on faith principles. This likewise fosters healthier communication and, in turn, helps strengthen good family bonds through the prayers offered. All this will enhance the family and lay the groundwork for forgiveness, empathy, and mutual understanding. The above are vital for enhancing and maintaining the family's mental health and well-being. The intersection and interplay of the roles pastors play in offering counselling and care to families, and the subsequent

sustenance of family mental health through such counsel, are the major focus of this paper.

Concept of Pastoral Care and Counselling

The concept of Pastoral Counselling pre-dates this contemporary dispensation. “Pastoral counselling is the practice of talking with individuals, couples, and families to increase their understanding of emotional and religious conflicts and to help resolve problems using religious and other resources” (Moruf, 2023, 51). Furthermore, in underpinning this explicitly, Moruf posits that “Pastoral counseling is a form of counseling that integrates psychological principles with spiritual guidance, often provided by clergy or individuals with a strong religious background” (2023), or “Pastoral counseling is a form of counseling that integrates psychological insights with spiritual guidance, often provided by religious leaders or trained professionals within a faith community” (Moruf, 2023, 49-50). It is worth noting that clergy or trained individuals usually provide counselling of this sort to address spiritual, psychological, or emotional issues in life that affect individuals, families, or society as a whole.

It is pertinent to state that every family in any given societal landscape is a unit or a composite aggregate of the broader society. Also, each family is part of the populace that interacts and carries out its daily undertakings and endeavours for survival in any given pluralistic society. Consequently, many people claim to have worthwhile undertakings, vocations, careers, and religious ways of life, despite their arrogant and uncompassionate social relationships, which they exhibit among humanity, what a paradox! Donald Bloesch rightly posits that they are “arrogant and uncompassionate in a world of pluralism, a world in which there are many worthwhile religious ways” (Donald, 1991, 9). So, when families live in a society full of such personalities and ways of life, certainly pastoral guidance is required to avoid falling victim to the intricacies that emanate from such unscrupulous elements. This underscores why it is not advisable

for any family member, in any form of dilemma or travail, to turn to such uncultured and unscrupulous people for counsel, because the manner and kind of therapy such people will offer or proffer most likely will not achieve the expected or desired result. More importantly, such people are even limited when they are not professional or trained experts in giving therapy to people in a dilemma; hence, there is an extent and limit to which any therapy can help. Richard indeed says; “However intricately a clinical theory can help us analyze a client's dilemma, it cannot tell us why any of the various dramas in anyone's life is worth caring about or what meaning our lives have --- We can do therapy, come up with clever interventions, but we're going to die anyway, just like everybody else” (1991, 5).

Therefore, there is a need for pastoral counselling intervention and involvement. Here, the pastor is spiritually mature and trained, with various potentialities and technical wherewithal to offer counsel and care that will provide a long-lasting solution to any unsatisfactory situation or circumstance. Scott Peck, while explaining mature spirituality, as a notable basis for offering or proffering solution to any pathetic or deplorable situation and a state of dilemma in any given family and even the society in general, and in collaboration with one another and with the universe, asserts that, “a mystical communal stage of spiritual development, a stage of unity, of an underlying connectedness between things: between men and women, between us and the other creatures and even inanimate matter as well, fitting together according to an ordinarily invisible fabric underlying the cosmos” (Scott, 1987, 21).

Considering the family function by Rodney Hunter, it shows that certain roles, boundaries, communication, nurture, emotional safety, discipline, mutual support, etc., are operating well; if not, there will be dysfunction. It is clear that every family is not isolated from the travails and troubles of this world; hence, a nuclear family consisting

of the father, mother, and their children needs to be guided by care and counsel from pastors to experience consistent happiness and joy, including everything that makes life blissful. However, it is unfortunate that this has not always been the case. Amazingly, the kinds of challenges some families encounter often lead society to believe that there are unseen powers, forces, and authorities waging war against the family. Adrian Rogers rightly said that, “but today all of the artillery of hell seems to be aimed at the nuclear family—humanism, relativism, materialism, hedonism” (Adrian, 2005). Ruminating and pondering on the various ills that bedevil families, Garry Collins, in his book, *Family Shock: Keeping Families Strong in the Midst of Earthshaking Change*, says that;

Many people today are scared, fearful about their safety, worried about their families, and lacking in hope for the future. Almost every day, the newspapers and television reporters tell us about crime, abuse, uncontrolled sexuality, militant groups that push their perverted values, teenage pregnancies, poverty-stricken families, single-parent frustrations, poor schools, neglected children, and kids that kill other kids. In our homes – including the homes of Christians –there is conflict, tension, insensitivity, communication breakdown, and probably more abuse than we dare admit. We face endless demands that rob us of our time, pull us apart, and disrupt our hopes for family unity and stability. A host of forces shake our homes and cause our families to crumble, but three are of major impact: catastrophic change, persistent pressure, and pervasive pessimism (1995).

However, of all the predicaments that befall the family, there is a potent weapon with which they could be addressed or taken care of. As regards this, Rogers says, “The chief weapon in our arsenal is truth that brings a fixed standard for right and wrong, and that truth is

encapsulated in the ten commandments” (2005). Clearly, this emphatically highlights the necessity of pastoral counselling in each family as a veritable tool to mitigate, curtail, and effectively check the various menaces within the family's purview. It is worth stating that God is interested in the well-being of the family, considering the record of the first family, which God instituted in the Bible in Genesis chapter 3: the harmonious, cordial relationship of visiting the couple in the cool of the day, which transpired and was evident between God. The first family indicates that God is concerned about their mental health and general well-being. Rogers added, “God has a plan to give us successful homes. It is given to us in his Word and is communicated in divine shorthand in the Ten Commandments, his perfect law. If we want to have homes that win, we can rediscover God's will as revealed in His Ten Commandments” (2005). According to Plato, “The life of the nation is the life of the family written large”, and it should be noted that the disintegration of society usually starts from the family, which then permeates the entire nooks and crannies of society. Likewise, if the society will have a solid cohesion and a well-articulated national security architecture, such a foundation is easily laid from the family, Adrian rightly opined, “There is a war going on ---, a battle for the soul of our nation. The battleground is the home, and *the issue is truth*. Satan has aimed all of the artillery of hell at our homes, and every shell in that artillery is a lie” (2005, 5-7). Therefore, pastoral counselling is of utmost importance and necessity to build strong family mental health. Such counsels enable the family to evade the wiles and intricacies that destabilise the family's mental fabric and, consequently, help it to manoeuvre the manipulations and wicked antics of the evil ones against the family. In three sentences, kindly summarise the pastoral care functions as discussed by Gary Collins. Various aspects of the family that possibly require the counselling of a pastor, which can help enhance a consistent and stable family mental health, are discussed below:

Marital Problems

Several challenges and conflicts witnessed in a marriage often are symptoms of attitudes emanating from sin, deliberate rejection of God's will, lack of love, anger, communication gap or problems, unwillingness to forgive, bitterness, selfishness, anxiety, sexual mistreatment, substance abuse, feeling of inferiority, etc., Collins explains that, “each of these can cause tension in the home, each can be influenced by husband or wife” (Gary, 2007, np). Giving scriptural consideration, Gary posits that marital problems are evidently not analysed; however, he asserts that the Bible addresses marital conflict only indirectly and, when viewed in a broader sense, those underlying issues bedevilling many matrimonial problems are invariably considered in detail (Gary, 2007). As a fact, the three major categories of matrimonial issues are faulty communication, unfulfilled expectations, and disappointing sex. Pastors need to come in to offer sound counsel and care, which may serve as a probable way out of such situations, based on the Biblical point of view and directives, together with the Holy Spirit's inspiration and experiences.

Regarding unfulfilled expectations, some couples experience variations in their marital expectations, and at times these variations can be complex or simple. Perhaps, the various expectations might range from how best to celebrate their birthdays to how and where to spend their weekends, and even on the various financial obligations they intend to spend their money on, as well as how they would want the various duties at home handled and discharged. Surprisingly, amazingly, frustration problems from time to time set in when variations such as the above are ignored, and such issues might be challenging to handle.

Concerning disappointing sex, some of the couples are shaped based on the purview of their cultural worldview, more importantly, based on the knowledge which they have acquired from experienced old couples, especially on the aspect of the teachings about their sex lives. Hence, such a mentality and orientation shaped their perception, which culminated in the kind of anticipation every spouse would

likely expect in their intimate conjugal relationship. This underscores why some couples anticipate and hope for exciting and consistently satisfying sex lives, while on the other hand, some might be nursing fears and uncertainties in marital sex bliss.

Furthermore, concerning faulty communication, it is observed that whenever verbal or non-verbal communication results in contradiction, it most often leads to confusion and a breakdown of communication, since such communication, which ought to involve the sending and receiving of messages, has been muddled by contradictions. As expected, every person's facial outlook or countenance is supposed to be in tandem with their verbal expression, and this demonstrates why people's actions usually agree with their verbal expressions. Below are other related issues which usually cause marital problems;

Unhealthy relationships highlight what happens when a partner in a marriage grows closer and builds intimacy with another person, leading to a loss of trust and suspicion that might set in. When such trust is betrayed, it might cause the husband and wife to drift apart and, as a result, stop sharing confidence. This can make them stop developing life goals together, and in such a situation, it might make any of them vulnerable to intruders.

An unwise choice is another issue that can cause marital problems. The choice a spouse makes in a marriage is another determinant which can make or mar the marriage. When a spouse makes a wrong choice, it can crumble the marriage. It should be noted that keeping secrets from a spouse is another important issue that can cause marital problems. Also, it is pertinent to state that a weakened emotional bond can lead to marital problems. This highlights why the emotional bond between a husband and wife has been called the “golden thread that holds partners together” (Frank, 1987, p. 85). The activity and lifelines of a marriage matter because boredom can also lead to marital problems. Whenever a situation in a marriage

becomes dull and routine, there is a tendency for couples to look elsewhere for variety. Besides, personal differences and the like can equally cause family or marital problems.

Pastoral Care and Counselling Approach towards Mental Health of the Family

Pastoral Counselling in Marital Problems

Pastors who engage in pastoral counselling usually observe how highly tasky it has been. Gary Collins stated, “This is the kind of work that demands a lot of prayers and reliance on the Holy Spirit. Before starting, (and frequently thereafter) counsellors should look at themselves to clarify some of their own attitudes, possible prejudices, motivations and vulnerabilities” (Gary, 2007).

The following should be considered while administering pastoral counselling;

Foremost, the counsellor should take a close look at himself, underscoring the need to observe his attitudes and biases carefully. Notably, the counsellor needs to be alert to special issues related to couples counselling and care. At the same time, the counsellor should do their best to discern the basis and reason for which the couple has come for counselling and care. Likewise, the counsellor should not be assertive and, at the same time, not lord over the couple regarding the issues they have come for care and counselling; instead, he should partner with the couple in setting goals so as to achieve stable family mental health.

Moreover, the counsellor should not be self-centred; he should focus on the person, not himself. He should likewise focus on the problems. The pastor offering care and counselling should, at the same time, focus on a process that is result-oriented, be aware of common

mistakes likely to arise during the process, and try to avoid them within the purview of the counselling. When a couple is well-guided pastorally, a good marriage is built that gives birth to a mentally healthy family; hence, a coherent and secure society will be built at large.

Family Problems

It is observed that “No family is perfect and without problems and periodic crises” (Collins, 1995), and the various problems that befall every family range from misunderstandings that culminate in conflicts to crises. Also, there are communication breakdown, tension, insensitivity, poverty, unmet desire and demand, unrest among kids, abuse of various kinds, etc, just as it was posited earlier, “--- A host of forces shake our homes and cause our families to crumble, but three are of major impact: catastrophic change, persistent pressure, and pervasive pessimism” (Hamilton & Sussman, 1983, 7-37), and this highlights how each family respond differently in the face of all these challenges and difficulties, because “Every family is unique. This impacts how they cope with problems and how they can be helped, for example, there are several influences that mold every family and create family distinctive” (Kelvin & Christine, 2020, 5-9). Also, the factors that cause these problems in families vary and range from one family to another. Some of such factors are: the issue of personal history, which makes some family members keep secrets without revealing them to other members of the family, and examples of these issues are illegitimate pregnancy, divorce or previous marriage, past affair with other people, etc. If these issues are carefully and critically examined, they have the potential to hinder people from coping faithfully in a family crisis when the other members eventually learn about it. There are also issues of stress, in which a particular family member is under pressure and finds it difficult to relate well to others at a given point in time. Also, it is worth noting that the issue of resource control, which some families do not bother with, is easily coped with by families that have the strength and skills acquired by their members. In

contrast, there is a risk of a breakdown in peace due to specific weaknesses among some family members. Besides the above, there are other critical issues such as rules to be observed, the communication style that should be adopted in the family, worldview, cherished values, intimacy, commitment to agreement, role clarity, and other values.

Pastoral Counselling and the Family

To navigate the various challenges and problems encountered in families, as discussed above, will require the involvement of pastoral counselling and care to offer counsel, guidance, and care to families, thereby enhancing stable family mental health.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that whenever pastoral counselling and care are to be offered or given in a family, the pastor offering the counsel and care should take cognisance of the following: priority should be given to his attempt to analyse the present, not the past. Also, he should provide immediate, practical guidance and focus on the family, not the individual. Besides, he should adopt a psychological approach to reduce family tension, which demonstrates the pastor's proficiency during the counselling process in using his discretion to refer the family to where more cogent solutions and help could be obtained. A stable family mental health is usually achieved when families are helped to resolve their issues and crises through pastoral care and counselling. This consequently enables the family to have the technical know-how and wherewithal to handle their problems whenever they occur.

Conclusion

The Pastors who offer pastoral care and counselling to families are strategically positioned to provide guidance and care that can lead to the envisaged solution to the various challenges, problems, and crises that are bedevilling families, enabling them to achieve stable family mental health. This highlights and underscores the necessity for such pastors to be spiritually inclined and influenced so that they can shed light on dark situations in families through the use of Scripture,

experience, and the leading of the Holy Spirit. As each family constitutes a unit of the larger society from which most of the travails bedevilling families emanate, each family should avail herself of Pastors who can offer spiritual guidance and support for consistent mental health and well-being in this our contemporary time.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are vital in enhancing a stable family mental health in Nigeria;

1. There is a need for each family to have a pastor or spiritual father who, from time to time, offers useful counsel during times of trouble and challenges, especially believers in the Christian faith.
2. Every family should have a family altar where they worship together, study the word of God and teach the word of God to their family members. When God is the focus of the couple, they draw closer to each other, and as a result they end up having a happy home, particularly in Christian families.
Each family in the nation should endeavour to bring their children close to them; they should hug the children and build intimacy, which will help dissociate them from those wicked acts and people.
3. Every pastor should not give up or relent in propagating how marriages and homes should be conducted through noble practices.
4. Pastors should endeavour to encourage NGOs, together with other governmental agencies, not to relent in sensitising the public about the right and wrong values of life. They should urge those who engage in heinous acts to desist from all forms of assault.
5. Churches and communities should have welfare units and centres which are composed of pastors who offer pastoral care and counselling, so that families that are having challenges and difficulties can approach them for guidance, counsel, and care, irrespective of their ethnic or religious affiliations.

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