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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

NAVIGATING THROUGH THE COMPLEXITIES OF FAMILY MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING IN CONTEMPORARY TIME

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Abstract

Navigating the complexities of family mental health and well-being in contemporary times requires a multidimensional understanding of the family's role within society and the unique challenges it faces. Families are foundational social units that significantly influence individual mental health and collective well-being. Drawing on biblical perspectives, the family is portrayed as a sacred institution, emphasising care, support, and resilience, which remain relevant to mental health discourse today. However, the nature of family life is inherently challenging due to evolving dynamics, interpersonal conflicts, and the rising prevalence of mental health disorders affecting family members. These complexities necessitate specialised approaches such as family therapy, which plays a crucial role in addressing mental health issues by improving communication, fostering empathy, and rebuilding trust within family systems. Sustaining family mental health demands strategic interventions, including counselling services that support ongoing mental health dynamics and equip families with coping mechanisms. Despite these efforts, families encounter persistent challenges such as stigma, inadequate resources, and the pressures of modern life, which can undermine mental health sustainability. This study

explores the interplay between family structures, mental health challenges, and therapeutic interventions, offering insights into effective strategies for fostering resilience and well-being. By integrating sociocultural and spiritual dimensions with clinical practices, this comprehensive approach underscores the importance of holistic support systems. Ultimately, understanding and addressing these multifaceted aspects are essential for promoting healthier families that can thrive amid the complexities of contemporary life.

Keywords: Family mental health and Well-being

Introduction

In today's fast-paced and ever-evolving world, families face an array of unprecedented challenges that significantly impact their mental health and overall well-being. The complexities surrounding family dynamics, mental health awareness, and access to support systems have intensified, making it crucial to understand and address these issues comprehensively. Globally, families face various problems. As individuals age, family relationships often become more complex, with sometimes complicated marital histories, varying relationships with children, competing time pressures, and obligations for care. The potential risks and rewards of these family relationships have a cumulative impact on health and well-being over the life course (Thomas, 2025). Contemporary times present unique stressors, including technological influences, economic uncertainties, social isolation, and shifting cultural norms, all of which contribute to the intricate landscape of family mental health in Nigeria and beyond. The family is the foundational unit of society, shaping the emotional, moral, and spiritual life of its members. It is within the family that individuals develop their identity, learn values, and form social bonds. However, the same family structure that offers love and support can also be a source of stress, conflict, and

psychological disorder when dynamics are unhealthy. In this paper, we explore the multifaceted role of the family in promoting or challenging mental health, drawing on biblical principles, psychological insights, and counselling strategies to sustain family health and wellbeing in contemporary society.

The Role of Family in Society

The family serves several vital functions within society. One of the most important is socialisation. The family is where children first learn about the world, acquire language, internalise societal norms, and develop their moral compass. This role of family is highlighted by Emile Durkheim's theory of social integration, which posits that familial bonds help individuals internalise collective values that are essential for societal cohesion (Durkheim, 2013). Moreover, the family provides emotional support and a sense of belonging, which is crucial for the mental health and well-being of individuals. Psychological studies consistently demonstrate that strong familial bonds are associated with improved emotional regulation, reduced stress, and a stronger sense of identity (Cohen & Wills, 2021). Families are the first space where individuals learn to develop interpersonal relationships and cope with challenges. For example, a study by Pinquart (2021) emphasises how the presence of family support is critical in helping individuals navigate difficulties such as loss, illness, or economic hardship. McClean (2022) demonstrates how family is a major biblical theme and should be a significant concern for Christian ethics and ministry. As 21st-century Western culture continues this “second demographic transition”, it is imperative to understand family from its place in the mission of God, especially when considering how Jesus calls disciples beyond family life, but also to return to family life to serve him. Family should be a serious focus in social ethics and ministry. A close look at the

aforementioned views reveals the enormous role of the family in society. The roles of family are biblically identified as captured below:

Foundation of moral values: The family is the first place where individuals are taught right from wrong. It is within the home that children learn virtues like honesty, kindness, patience, and respect. When families instil strong moral values, they produce responsible and upright citizens, strengthening the moral fabric of society. Biblically, this is affirmed in Proverbs 22:6, which says, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” This highlights the family's God-given responsibility to shape the character of its members.

Source of love and emotional support: A healthy family offers unconditional love, acceptance, and a sense of belonging, which are essential for emotional well-being. In times of trouble, family members are expected to support and comfort one another. This reflects God's design for the home as a place of compassion and unity. In 1 Corinthians 13, the apostle Paul describes love as patient, kind, and enduring; all traits that should flourish in a family. Psalm 68:6 says, “God sets the lonely in families,” emphasising the family as a refuge of emotional care.

Agent of socialisation: Families are the primary agents through which individuals are introduced to societal norms, values, language, and culture. Through day-to-day interactions, children learn how to behave in society and relate to others. This role is biblically supported in Deuteronomy 6:6–7, where God commands parents: “These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road...” Socialisation, from a biblical standpoint, includes teaching God's laws and modelling righteous living.

Provider of basic needs: The family is responsible for meeting the physical needs of its members, such as food, shelter, clothing, and

protection. A stable family structure ensures that each person has what is necessary to live with dignity. This role reflects biblical instruction in 1 Timothy 5:8, which says, “Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” Meeting one another's needs is a practical expression of love and stewardship within the family.

Instrument of spiritual development: Beyond physical and emotional needs, families play a vital role in nurturing the spiritual growth of their members. Parents are called to teach their children about God, lead them in prayer, and exemplify a life of faith. Joshua 24:15 declares, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” This highlights the significance of a family's unified dedication to God. When families prioritise spiritual development, they contribute to a godlier and morally upright society.

Support system for the elderly and vulnerable: In society, families are expected to care for the elderly, the sick, and the vulnerable. This role not only preserves human dignity but also honours God's command to respect and care for our parents and relatives. Exodus 20:12 says, “Honour your father and your mother,” and James 1:27 reminds us that “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress.” Such care is not only a social duty but a spiritual act of obedience and compassion.

Stabiliser of society: Families contribute to societal stability by producing responsible citizens and reducing social vices such as crime, neglect, and moral decay. A society with strong families is more likely to experience peace, order, and development. The Bible affirms the importance of household order in Colossians 3:18–21, which outlines harmonious family roles, including those of wives, husbands, children, and parents, all under the lordship of Christ. When families live in order and love, society as a whole is blessed.

The roles that families play in society are deeply intertwined with the

mental health and overall well-being of their members. When a family serves as the foundation of moral values, it provides a clear sense of identity, purpose, and boundaries, which fosters emotional stability and reduces anxiety and confusion, especially in children and adolescents. A child who is raised knowing right from wrong, with consistent discipline and love, is more likely to develop confidence and self-control. As Proverbs 22:6 teaches, training a child in the right way has lifelong effects, including mental resilience. Likewise, when the family functions as a source of love and emotional support, it becomes a critical buffer against mental health issues such as depression, loneliness, and stress. Families that express love, practice forgiveness, and offer emotional safety create an environment where individuals can heal from trauma and grow. This aligns with the biblical view in 1 Corinthians 13, where love is portrayed as the highest virtue, one that nurtures emotional well-being. Unconditional love and acceptance from family are especially protective during times of personal crisis.

The family as an agent of socialisation helps individuals develop healthy communication skills, empathy, and self-esteem; all key factors in mental wellness. Children who are guided through social and spiritual values grow up with a sense of belonging and purpose. Deuteronomy 6:6–7 reminds parents to engage their children in meaningful conversations about faith and life, promoting both spiritual and emotional maturity. This kind of upbringing builds resilience and helps prevent behavioural and psychological problems later in life. When the family fulfils its role as a provider of basic needs, it alleviates stress and insecurity. Poverty, neglect, or instability in the home often lead to chronic anxiety and mental health disorders. However, a home that consistently meets physical needs fosters peace and contentment. 1 Timothy 5:8 emphasises the importance of provision, not just for survival but as a sign of spiritual integrity. Mental health flourishes in environments where basic needs are met without fear or instability. In its role as an instrument of

spiritual development, the family nurtures hope, faith, and inner peace, which are the foundations of mental well-being. Spiritual practices, such as prayer, worship, and reading Scripture, can help alleviate stress and foster a sense of meaning and connection. A close examination of the roles of family in society is a pointer to the fact that when these roles are not adequately fulfilled, the impact on family health and well-being can be compromised.

Biblical Perspectives on Family and Mental Health

In Christian theology, the family is considered a divinely ordained institution, with Biblical scripture providing a foundational framework for understanding familial roles, responsibilities, and the holistic nature of family life. The Bible emphasises love, respect, and responsibility within the family, not only as social obligations but as spiritual mandates that foster emotional well-being and social cohesion. One of the most notable passages, Ephesians 5:22–6:4, offers comprehensive guidance for family relationships. Paul calls husbands to love their wives sacrificially, wives to respect and support their husbands, children to honour their parents, and fathers to nurture their children with discipline and care in the Lord's instruction. This passage underscores the emotional dimension of family life; love, respect, and care are the bedrock of healthy emotional bonds that foster security and trust among family members. It also highlights the social order within the family, illustrating the roles that help maintain harmony and stability.

The theological understanding of marriage as a sacred union is articulated in Genesis 2:24: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” This verse speaks to both the spiritual and social covenant of marriage, emphasising unity, commitment, and mutual support as essential for family integrity. Marriage, in this sense, is more than a social contract; it is a spiritual bond that nurtures emotional intimacy

and social responsibility. Psalm 127:3 reminds believers that "Children are a heritage from the Lord," reinforcing the sacredness of parenthood and the duty to nurture children physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. Parents are called to be not only providers and protectors but also spiritual guides, raising their children in faith, wisdom, and love. Beyond individual roles, the Bible advocates for the family as a community where emotional support, social interaction, and spiritual growth are intertwined. Families are often seen as the primary context in which individuals learn empathy, forgiveness, and service, which are essential qualities for emotional maturity and social harmony. Spiritually, the family functions as a "domestic church," a place where faith is nurtured through prayer, worship, and shared values, fostering a deep sense of belonging and purpose. The biblical perspective on family integrates emotional warmth, social responsibility, and spiritual nurturing, portraying the family as a holistic unit designed to support the well-being of each member and to serve as a reflection of God's love and order in the world.

Biblical teachings emphasise the importance of love, care, and unity within families, all of which contribute to mental well-being. A nurturing family environment fosters emotional resilience and self-worth, both of which are vital for maintaining mental health. The Bible also emphasises the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation within families. Matthew 18:21-22 emphasises the importance of boundless forgiveness, a concept that can help alleviate familial conflict and foster emotional healing. In the context of mental health, forgiveness within the family can be transformative, healing wounds from past traumas and enabling healthier emotional bonds.

The Changing Nature of Family and the Effect of Family Dynamics on Mental Health

The concept of "family" is deeply rooted in both cultural traditions and religious beliefs, serving as the foundational unit of society. While the structure and function of families can vary across cultures and historical periods, they have consistently played a central role in fostering socialisation, emotional support, and the transmission of values. In contemporary times, the notion of family has evolved, yet it remains a key institution in shaping individual identities, societal norms, and communal well-being. Traditionally, family has been defined as a group of individuals who are related by blood, marriage, or adoption. This can encompass nuclear families (parents and children), extended families (which include relatives such as grandparents, uncles, and aunts), and other forms of kinship. However, as societal norms change, the traditional family structure is often redefined to include non-biological relationships, such as chosen families, cohabiting couples, or single-parent households (Cherlin, 2022). Sociologists have increasingly recognised that the family is not merely a biological concept, but rather a social construct that reflects the diverse ways people come together to provide mutual support, raise children, and fulfil emotional, financial, and psychological needs (Gerson & Jacobs, 2020). In the modern context, the family can take on various forms, reflecting shifting attitudes toward marriage, gender roles, and individual autonomy. For example, recent studies show an increasing trend of cohabiting couples without marriage, same-sex partnerships, and families with single parents. Despite these changes, the fundamental functions of the family remain largely unchanged, providing love, security, and care (Bumpass, 2023).

The changing nature of the family indicates that it is not static but evolves in response to shifting societal norms, economic conditions,

and cultural trends. The rise of dual-income households, changing gender roles, and the normalisation of various family structures such as single-parent homes and same-sex couples have all contributed to a redefinition of what constitutes a family today (Cohen, 2023). While the Biblical model of family continues to hold significance for many believers, it is essential to recognise the diversity of family forms in the contemporary world. Despite these changes, the primary functions of family, nurturing, protecting, and educating remain consistent. The growing recognition of non-traditional families highlights the evolving nature of human relationships and the importance of inclusive definitions of family that embrace love, commitment, and mutual care, rather than a rigid, monolithic structure (Lammers, 2022).

Family dynamics can play a significant role in both the onset and management of mental health conditions. For example, children who grow up in environments with high levels of parental conflict or domestic violence may develop anxiety, depression, or behavioural disorders (Deater-Deckard & Scarr, 2021). Similarly, dysfunctional family environments characterised by neglect, emotional abuse, or substance use can increase the risk of children developing mental health disorders in later life (McFadyen & Coatsworth, 2020). Family support is also crucial in the management of mental health conditions. For individuals with conditions such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or eating disorders, family involvement in treatment can lead to better outcomes (Hoffmann et al., 2022). A supportive family can encourage individuals to seek treatment, offer emotional support, and create an environment that fosters recovery. However, families can also inadvertently perpetuate mental health problems by enabling unhealthy behaviours or lacking the knowledge to provide proper support (Germain & Gelfand, 2021). Therefore, family education and awareness are vital to improving outcomes for individuals with mental health challenges.

The Role of Family Therapy in Mental Health in Contemporary Times

Mental health is an essential component of overall well-being, and the family plays a pivotal role in shaping an individual's mental health outcomes. As the primary social unit, families provide emotional support, stability, and security, all of which significantly influence psychological resilience and the ability to cope with stress. However, the family can also be a source of distress, conflict, or dysfunction, which can contribute to mental health struggles. Understanding the complex dynamics between family relationships and mental health is crucial for both individuals and communities. Family systems play a significant role in both promoting and detracting from mental health. As a primary source of emotional support, family provides a foundation for emotional regulation, self-esteem, and coping mechanisms. According to a study by Foster et al. (2023), family cohesion is strongly associated with improved mental health outcomes for individuals, particularly among children and adolescents. A supportive family can act as a protective buffer against stress and trauma, reducing the risk of developing mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Conversely, family conflict, abuse, or neglect can have long-term detrimental effects on mental health. Chronic family dysfunction, characterised by unresolved conflicts or emotional distance, has been linked to higher rates of mood disorders and behavioural issues (Brown et al., 2022). The concept of *family resilience* refers to a family's ability to adapt and thrive in the face of adversity. Research indicates that families who exhibit open communication, adaptability, and strong emotional bonds are better equipped to deal with external stressors, such as financial hardship or health crises (Masten&Coatsworth, 2021). This type of resilience fosters a sense of security and support, promoting individual well-being. Conversely, when families experience breakdowns in communication, trust, or affection, individuals are more likely to

experience emotional instability and psychological difficulties; this situation may require therapeutic intervention to handle.

Family therapy has emerged as an effective approach to addressing mental health issues within the family context. This therapeutic modality focuses on improving communication, resolving conflicts, and fostering positive relationships. According to studies by Whiffen et al. (2022), family therapy is particularly beneficial in treating children and adolescents with anxiety, depression, and behavioural issues. By involving the whole family, therapists aim to shift the family system from one of dysfunction to one of support and understanding. Family therapy has also proven effective for managing conditions such as addiction, eating disorders, and trauma, with families learning how to better support their loved ones in recovery. Through family therapy, individuals can learn to set healthy boundaries, enhance emotional expression, and develop effective coping strategies. This holistic approach not only supports the individual but also strengthens the family unit as a whole, creating a more nurturing environment for everyone involved.

In today's fast-paced, interconnected world, sustaining family mental health has become an increasingly complex challenge. Families today face various stressors, including financial pressures, technological distractions, changing gender roles, and the demands of modern work life. At the same time, the nature of family dynamics has evolved, with more diverse family structures now common, such as single-parent families, blended families, and same-sex parent families. Despite these changes, the need to maintain mental health within the family unit remains critical, as the well-being of family members directly influences the emotional and psychological health of each individual. Family dynamics, as the patterns of interaction between family members, are central to sustaining mental health. Healthy

family dynamics foster emotional support, stability, and a sense of belonging, which are essential for mental well-being. Research shows that strong, positive family relationships serve as a buffer against life's challenges, reducing the likelihood of mental health problems (Pinquart, 2021). For example, a supportive family environment helps children build self-esteem and emotional resilience, which in turn contributes to better mental health outcomes throughout life (Cohen, 2023). On the other hand, dysfunctional family dynamics, such as poor communication, high conflict, or neglect, can contribute to mental health issues. Studies indicate that family conflict is a significant predictor of anxiety and depression in both children and adults (Gerson & Jacobs, 2020). Therefore, fostering open communication, empathy, and conflict resolution skills within the family is crucial for sustaining mental health. In contemporary society, families face unique challenges that can strain mental health. The increasing demands for work-life balance, the impact of technology on communication, and the pressures of modern-day living contribute to rising levels of stress. Therefore, families must find ways to adapt and support one another through these challenges, one of which is through counselling strategies.

Counselling Strategies for Sustaining Family Mental Health

Key strategies for sustaining family mental health are as follows;

Open Communication: Effective communication is essential for maintaining a healthy family environment. Families that engage in open, honest, and empathetic conversations are more likely to resolve conflicts in constructive ways and provide emotional support to one another. Effective communication skills, such as active listening and validating emotions, can enhance family connections and reduce misunderstandings (Foster et al., 2023). Research has shown that families with strong communication skills experience fewer mental

health problems, as they are better able to address and cope with stressors (Cohen & Wills, 2021).

Scripture also highlights the importance of communication within families. Ephesians 4:29 advises, “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.” This verse emphasises the importance of using words that uplift and encourage one another, thereby fostering a positive family environment where members feel heard and supported.

Building Emotional Support Systems: Emotional support from family members is crucial in sustaining mental health. Research suggests that families who offer emotional support provide a protective shield against psychological distress, especially during times of crisis or transition (Masten&Coatsworth, 2021). A reliable support system enables family members to share their worries, receive comfort, and gain perspective on challenges, thereby alleviating feelings of isolation and anxiety. The Bible emphasises the importance of mutual support within families. Galatians 6:2 says, “*Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*” This verse emphasises the importance of supporting one another during difficult times and highlights the role of families in helping each other through emotional struggles. By offering encouragement, comfort, and empathy, family members can strengthen each other's emotional resilience.

Promoting Resilience Through Coping Strategies: Resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity, and it plays a critical role in sustaining family mental health. Families that can develop healthy coping strategies are better equipped to manage stress and overcome challenges. Research indicates that families who engage in problem-solving, maintain flexibility, and adapt to changing circumstances tend to have higher levels of family resilience (Lammers, 2022). Furthermore, promoting healthy coping mechanisms, such as physical activity, mindfulness practices, and creative outlets, can

help reduce stress and improve the mental health of family members. Biblically, resilience is a key theme. James 1:2-4 reminds believers, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness." This passage teaches the value of perseverance in the face of trials, which can strengthen both individuals and families. By cultivating resilience, families can navigate difficulties while maintaining their emotional well-being.

Technology and Boundaries: In contemporary families, technology plays a dual role—while it can enhance communication and provide access to helpful resources, it can also lead to stress, isolation, and family conflicts if not managed carefully. The rise of social media, excessive screen time, and work-related technology can create barriers to face-to-face interaction, eroding family bonds and contributing to increased feelings of loneliness. Research has shown that families who set healthy boundaries around technology use report better mental health outcomes and more meaningful connections (Brown et al., 2022). To maintain mental health, families should prioritise in-person interactions, limit screen time during family activities, and ensure that technology does not become a source of stress. Establishing clear boundaries around when and how technology is used can foster better family relationships and reduce the negative impact of digital distractions.

Seeking Professional Help When Needed: Family therapy or counselling can provide valuable support when mental health issues arise. Professional therapists can help families address underlying issues, enhance communication, and develop more effective coping mechanisms. Research has shown that family therapy is particularly effective in treating a range of mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, and behavioural disorders (Whiffen et al., 2022).

Adhering to the Biblical Perspective on Seeking Help

The Bible encourages seeking wisdom and guidance, particularly

during times of struggle. Proverbs 11:14 states, "Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counsellors there is safety." This verse emphasises the importance of seeking help when needed, which can include turning to mental health professionals to strengthen the family's emotional and psychological health.

The role of counselling in sustaining family mental health has become more critical in contemporary times due to the rapid pace of societal and technological change. Families today face an array of challenges, including increased work pressures, technological distractions, shifting societal norms, and a growing awareness of mental health issues. These challenges can place immense stress on family dynamics, often leading to communication breakdowns, conflict, or emotional distress. Family counselling plays a pivotal role in addressing these issues, fostering healthy communication, resolving conflicts, and supporting individual family members in navigating mental health challenges. Through counselling, families can enhance their emotional connections, build resilience, and develop effective coping strategies to navigate life's challenges. In modern society, families are often caught in a web of external pressures, including economic instability, social media influence, and the demands of contemporary work life. These external stressors can create emotional strain within the family unit, leading to issues such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, domestic violence, and marital conflict. Research has shown that unresolved family conflict and dysfunction are strong predictors of mental health problems for both children and adults (Brown et al., 2022). This underscores the importance of counselling, as it provides a structured environment for families to address their emotional and psychological concerns. Family counselling, also known as family therapy, involves a trained professional working with family members to enhance communication, resolve conflicts, and address mental health issues within the family context (Whiffen et al., 2022). One of the key advantages of counselling is that it addresses the family as a whole,

acknowledging the interconnectedness of family members' mental health. In contrast to treating individuals in isolation, family counselling emphasises how the family system can work together to support each other's mental and emotional well-being.

Counselling has numerous roles to play in strengthening family dynamics, such as;

Improving Communication: One of the primary goals of family counselling is to improve communication within the family. Dysfunctional communication, such as passive-aggressive behaviour, avoidance, or hostile exchanges, can significantly impact family members' mental health and exacerbate stress. Family therapists work with family members to teach them effective communication strategies, such as active listening, expressing feelings without judgment, and providing constructive feedback (Cohen & Wills, 2021). These strategies help family members feel heard and understood, which is essential for maintaining emotional stability and reducing mental health struggles. Biblically, communication is highly emphasised. Ephesians 4:29 urges, “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.” This verse emphasises the importance of using words to build up, not tear down, and encourages families to utilise communication as a tool for healing and growth.

Conflict Resolution: Families inevitably experience conflicts, whether they are related to parenting styles, financial stress, or interpersonal differences. Without intervention, these conflicts can escalate and harm family relationships, contributing to mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. Counselling provides families with tools for conflict resolution, teaching them how to manage disagreements in a healthy and productive way. Family therapists introduce techniques such as negotiation, compromise, and emotional regulation, which help families address disagreements without resorting to harmful behaviours like yelling or withdrawal.

(Gerson & Jacobs, 2020). Biblical teachings also emphasise reconciliation and conflict resolution. Matthew 5:9 states, “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*” This passage encourages the pursuit of peace and reconciliation, both of which are essential to maintaining family harmony and mental well-being. Counselling can be seen as an extension of this Biblical teaching, helping families work through conflicts with patience and understanding.

Supporting Mental Health Needs: Family counselling is particularly effective for families dealing with mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, eating disorders, or substance abuse. By involving the entire family, therapists can help family members understand the nature of these disorders, their impact on relationships, and how the family can support the individual in managing their condition. For example, families with a member suffering from depression may be taught how to provide emotional support without enabling unhealthy behaviours. This creates a more supportive environment for the individual while maintaining family balance (Pinquart, 2021). The Bible emphasises the importance of caring for one another, particularly in times of distress. In Galatians 6:2, Paul writes, “Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” This principle aligns with the role of family counselling in helping families provide the care and support needed for individuals to recover from mental health struggles. By bearing one another's burdens, families can help create a nurturing and supportive environment for mental health healing.

Fostering Resilience and Coping Strategies: Another key role of counselling is fostering family resilience, enabling families to become stronger and more adaptable in the face of adversity. Resilient families are better equipped to cope with stress and trauma, and they are more likely to bounce back from difficulties. Family therapists work with families to identify and build upon existing strengths, such as close relationships, shared values, or effective problem-solving skills. Through counselling, families can learn to

adapt to change and face challenges together, thereby improving their collective resilience (Masten&Coatsworth, 2021). Biblically, resilience is also encouraged. Romans 5:3-4 says, “*Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.*” This passage highlights the transformative power of adversity, demonstrating that through challenges, families can develop greater strength, character, and hope. Counselling helps families navigate through tough times and emerge stronger, much like the Biblical teachings of resilience.

Counselling strategies are necessary in contemporary times because there seems to be a notable increase in challenges in sustaining family mental health in society.

Challenges in Sustaining Family Mental Health in Contemporary Times

Some of the challenges in Sustaining Family Mental Health in Contemporary Times are:

Increased Financial Pressure: In today's economic climate, many families face financial stress due to job insecurity, rising living costs, and economic disparities. Financial struggles can lead to anxiety, depression, and interpersonal tension within the family unit. The stress of meeting basic needs or dealing with debt can put immense strain on mental health.

Technology and Digital Disconnection: While technology offers convenience and connectivity, excessive screen time and digital distractions can lead to isolation and deteriorate family relationships. Family members may become more engaged with digital platforms than with one another, reducing the quality of face-to-face communication and support.

Work-Life Imbalance: The pressure of balancing demanding work schedules with family obligations can lead to stress, burnout, and neglect of personal well-being. Many individuals experience guilt from not being able to spend enough time with family members or failing to prioritise self-care, contributing to emotional strain and family conflict.

Mental Health Stigma: Despite growing awareness of mental health issues, stigma remains a significant barrier for many families when seeking help. There may be fear of judgment or misunderstanding, preventing family members from seeking counselling or professional support when they are struggling emotionally or mentally.

Changing Family Structures: Family structures have evolved over the years, with an increase in single-parent households, blended families, and non-traditional relationships. These changing dynamics can present challenges in terms of adjusting to new roles, navigating co-parenting, or managing relationships with extended family members, which can impact the emotional well-being of family members.

Suggestions for Sustaining Family Mental Health

The following suggestions can strengthen family mental health in contemporary times:

Family Efforts: Families can sustain mental health by building strong community and church support systems, promoting mental health education, normalizing therapy and pastoral counselling, creating emotionally safe and spiritually grounded environments, equipping parents with parenting and conflict-resolution skills, and integrating faith into the healing process through prayer, Scripture, and fellowship; reflecting the call in Romans 12:2 for transformation through the renewal of the mind.

Promote Open Communication: Encouraging honest, respectful, and open communication within the family helps prevent misunderstandings and strengthens relationships. When family members feel safe to express their emotions and needs, they are more likely to feel supported and less likely to internalise stress or anxiety. Families should engage in regular conversations about emotions, concerns, and challenges. *Ephesians 4:29* emphasises the importance of using words that build others up, fostering a positive communication culture within families.

Set Boundaries Around Technology Use: Families should create specific times for technology-free activities, such as family meals, outings, or board games, to strengthen their relationships. Limiting screen time, especially in the evenings, encourages more meaningful face-to-face interactions and fosters a stronger emotional connection. Establishing boundaries around digital devices can help prevent distractions and promote quality time together.

Practice Self-Care and Time Management: To mitigate work-life imbalance, family members should prioritise self-care and personal well-being. Time management techniques, such as setting clear work boundaries, delegating tasks effectively, and carving out dedicated family time, can help reduce stress. Self-care activities, such as exercise, meditation, and hobbies, can enhance emotional resilience, enabling individuals to manage family obligations and emotional challenges better.

Seek Professional Help When Needed: It is essential to normalise seeking therapy or counselling when family members face mental health issues. Family therapy or individual counselling can address underlying issues, improve communication, and promote emotional healing. Professional support can help families build coping mechanisms, resolve conflicts, and foster emotional stability. Proverbs 11:14 reminds us, “Where there is no guidance, a people

falls, but in an abundance of counsellors there is safety,” highlighting the importance of seeking wisdom and guidance during difficult times.

Build a Support Network: Families should cultivate a strong support system by engaging with extended family, friends, and community resources. A healthy support network offers emotional encouragement, advice, and practical help during times of difficulty. Social support has been shown to be a protective factor for mental health, helping families feel less isolated and more empowered to face challenges together.

Conclusion

In both biblical and contemporary contexts, the family remains a vital institution for emotional support, moral guidance, and mental well-being. Healthy family dynamics, rooted in love, communication, and resilience, significantly enhance mental health outcomes, while dysfunction can cause harm. Family therapy and counselling play a key role in strengthening these dynamics, offering practical and spiritual tools to navigate modern challenges. As families face increasing pressures, sustaining mental health requires a holistic, faith-informed approach that prioritises unity, support, and emotional care for all members.

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