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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

ROLE OF PASTORAL CARE AND COUNSELLING IN SUSTAINING MENTAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN FROM DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES

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Abstract

Family is one of the fundamental units of society, comprising individuals related by blood, marriage, kinship, intimacy, or shared interests. Family dysfunction is a significant issue in all societies, as the family unit is the cornerstone of forming a child's character. A nurturing, supportive, and loving family environment is vital for the psychological well-being of children. A positive family atmosphere with open communication, strong parent-child relationships, peace, and cohesion provides a safe and proactive place for children to develop healthy behaviours. Children raised in families facing major challenges, such as ongoing conflict, neglect, or violence, are more vulnerable to developing mental health issues like depression and anxiety if these problems are not addressed. Exposure to factors like parental fighting, abuse, separation due to divorce, or parents working long hours can lead to behavioural and emotional imbalance. This paper examines how pastoral care and counselling can support the mental well-being of children from such difficult family backgrounds. To do this, a descriptive survey research method was used. It was discovered that pastoral care and counselling play an important role in supporting the mental health of children. By providing emotional and spiritual guidance, these services help promote healing, resilience, and reconciliation of families. Such support is essential for encouraging personal growth and breaking the cycle of dysfunction. Therefore, the study recommends that schools, religious organisations, and community groups collaborate to develop systems that identify children at risk and offer timely assistance.

Introduction

Children's mental health is becoming an increasingly important issue in today's society, especially when families are not functioning properly. Families are often the foundation for a child's emotional and social growth. However, when family relationships are troubled or dysfunctional, they can cause serious emotional and psychological stress for children. Because of this, a supportive and caring family environment is essential for children to develop good mental health. A positive family atmosphere—where there is open communication, strong bonds between parents and children, harmony, and togetherness—helps create a safe space for children to grow and develop healthy habits.

On the other hand, dysfunctional families often show signs of neglect, abuse, poor communication, and unresolved trauma (Walsh, 2016). These issues can lead to various mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, behavioural issues, low self-esteem, and social withdrawal (Minuchin, 1974). Kids raised in such environments are at higher risk of developing long-term mental health problems if these issues are not addressed, including depression and anxiety. Children who experience ongoing conflict, aggression, abuse, neglect, domestic violence, or parental separation—such as when parents work long hours or are frequently away—are more likely to develop behavioural and emotional challenges.

According to the World Health Organisation (2015), about one in ten people worldwide struggles with some form of mental illness. Despite this, only about one per cent of health professionals are working to treat these issues, emphasising a major need for more investment in mental health services. Pastoral care and counselling, which take a comprehensive approach by addressing emotional and spiritual aspects of a person's life, have been seen as promising ways

to support healing and help children from troubled families. This paper examines how pastoral care and counselling can be used in maintaining mental well-being within such family contexts.

Children and Mental Health

It is necessary to state that mental health is very much influenced by the culture in which a person lives. Something that may be acceptable in one culture can be a strange and abnormal thing in another culture. The World Health Organisation (WHO) describes mental health as a state where people feel generally good about themselves, handle everyday stresses, work effectively, and contribute to their community. Mental illness includes various diagnosable mental disorders, which often involve unusual thoughts, feelings, or behaviours. These illnesses are closely linked to a person's vulnerability in how they start and how they affect someone. Mental health matters at every stage of life, affecting both children and adults. According to the WHO, about one in six people worldwide is between ten (10) and nineteen (19) years old, and within this group, roughly one in seven face mental health issues. Childhood is a crucial time for developing healthy habits that promote mental well-being. Tough experiences during this sensitive period can harm a child's ability to develop healthily. The experiences children undergo during these years can shape their brain development in either positive or negative ways. Kids raised in caring environments filled with love and support tend to form strong bonds, trust others easily, and develop positive self-esteem.

On the other hand, children who grow up in environments with abuse or neglect often feel unloved and unappreciated. These children may struggle to form close relationships later in life because they find it difficult to trust others. They can become fearful of the world around them and see it as a dangerous place. Also, children who see violence

at home often face emotional, social, and mental challenges that increase their risk of developing mental health problems.

Growing up in a family that struggles with dysfunction can affect a child's well-being into adulthood. Kids often have little say in the tough living situations their parents or guardians create. Sometimes, parents involved in toxic relationships filled with violence or abuse do not think about how their actions might harm their children emotionally. They might not realise that their behaviour, even if not directed at the children, still has a profound impact on them. Unfortunately, this is often not the case. Patterns of harmful parenting, like emotional neglect, harsh punishment, or rejection, can leave lasting scars and lead to mental health challenges later on. In Nigeria, many family environments do not promote good mental health, mainly because there are ongoing conflicts and post-conflict struggles that create instability. Poverty is a significant factor that contributes heavily to mental health issues. There is a strong link between poverty and mental health—those living in poverty are generally more vulnerable to mental illnesses. At the same time, people who already have mental health problems can find themselves sinking deeper into poverty because they might find it harder to function normally. Difficult economic conditions can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation, which sometimes lead to depression, especially among vulnerable groups. There is a close connection between a family's overall mental health and its wider social well-being. Also, individuals dealing with mental health issues often find it harder to communicate their needs and get the support they require.

Understanding Dysfunctional Family

Dysfunctional families are an essential issue in today's society. While no family is perfect—since no one chooses their family—some families experience levels of dysfunction that raise serious concerns. Nelson (2019) describes a dysfunctional family as any situation that hampers healthy family functioning. It refers to a family struggling against ongoing stress and difficult circumstances, often marked by

negative parental behaviours. Guo et al. (2018) also note that family dysfunction is any scenario that stops a family from functioning normally and healthily. Dysfunctional families often face multiple conflicts—like tense relationships, chaos, neglect, abuse, poor communication, lack of empathy, controlling behaviours, hostility, mental health issues, criticism, and violence. These conflicts usually happen between parents, parents and children, or siblings. Daily life in such a family feels uncertain and unstable, creating an environment where members often feel unsafe. Instead of working through issues or expressing concerns positively, people in these families tend to accept and normalise unacceptable behaviours like abuse, victimisation, or ongoing conflict. While disagreements are natural in any relationship, dysfunctional families' model unhealthy ways of handling disputes. The main problem is poor communication—often replaced with shouting, arguing, or silence. The negative dynamics in such families can cause lasting harm, especially to children, leaving emotional scars that are hard to heal. In these environments, one or both parents might display inconsistent or harmful parenting styles, making the home unpredictable and unstable. Sadly, the effects of such parental behaviours—like substance abuse, mental health issues, abuse, or strict control—can affect children long after they leave the family home. These issues can continue to impact them well into adulthood, as noted by Apriyeni and Patricia (2021).

Furthermore, children from dysfunctional households experience a sudden interruption in their development and end up taking on the role of raising their younger siblings. Additionally, they are more likely to display moderate to severe mental health conditions, such as anxiety, depression, and maybe suicidal thoughts (Ulitua&Soetikno, 2022). Additionally, most of these kids find it difficult to form strong friendships with their classmates as they age, usually due to shyness or another personality disorder. They typically spend long periods alone engaging in activities such as watching television, playing video games, browsing the internet, listening to music, and doing other tasks that do not require in-person social interaction (Spinelli et al., 2021).

Ozturk (2022) found that the majority of children often feel angry, anxious, depressed, lonely, or unlovable; they may also have speech problems that are connected to emotional abuse. They exhibit signs of poor psychological wellness in various contexts, such as when they become paranoid and generally distrustful of others. Adults who grew up in dysfunctional homes also typically report having trouble maintaining a sense of self-worth, forming and maintaining intimate friendships, and believing in other people. According to Coohey et al. (2011), they cannot frequently be playful because they repress their emotions and realities out of fear of losing control.

Studies show that children who witness disruption in their families are more likely to experience anxiety disorders, depression, and social difficulties (Green et al., 2018). The negative dynamics that are present in dysfunctional families cause suffering and leave behind irreversible emotional wounds, which negatively impact children's developing personalities and give them a pessimistic outlook on life in general. This is because the family has a significant impact on a child's development, laying the groundwork for the formation of their identity, values, socially acceptable norms, and morals. It does this by providing a secure environment, love, and affection, as well as fostering social awareness and self-assurance.

Accordingly, the family's lifestyle, parenting style, and degree of functioning can all positively impact the child's growth and development. Children are prone to take into adulthood what they have seen and learnt. Children frequently develop maladaptive coping strategies like aggressiveness or withdrawal from dysfunctional homes, which can feed a vicious cycle of emotional instability (Walker, 2022).

Types of Dysfunctional Family

Different types of dysfunctional families are explained below:

- 1. Deficient Family:** In this case, children assume adult responsibilities at an early age, with the emotional needs of the parents coming first. In this type of household, children take on the role of

carers for their parents, depriving them of their youth.

2. **Emotional or Psychologically Disturbed family:** By controlling them and making decisions for them, the parents in this family constantly justify the actions of their family members. Additionally, the parents in this family are motivated by a fear of losing their significance in their children's life.
3. **Chemical or Alcoholic Dependent family:** This type of family lacks norms and is disorderly and erratic. Discussions regarding alcohol consumption or associated family issues are prohibited, as are emotional outbursts.
4. **Physical or Sexual Abusive Family:** This family is marked by recurrent sexual abuse, marital violence, criticism, and belittling, which causes family members to develop feelings of shame, worthlessness, and self-loathing (Animba et al., 2022).

Causes of Family Dysfunction

The following factors contribute to family dysfunction:

1. **Financial Crisis:** Family finance, which arises when a family experiences severe poverty or a financial crisis, also places additional strain on the adults' mental health, resulting in toxic stress that fuels dysfunctional behaviour within the family. Parents who are under financial strain also experience anxiety, which causes the family structure to break down and result in arguments and discord (Nelson, 2019).
2. **Chronic Illness:** A long-term chronic disease or mental instability may also be the cause of family dysfunction. In these cases, caring for a sick loved one can place undue strain on the caregiver, who may take on parental responsibilities, such as providing for basic needs like food. To make ends meet, this may cause young individuals to turn to both legal

and illegal, fast-track sources of income.

The Role of Pastoral Care in Mental Health Support of Children

To heal, support, guide, and reconcile troubled individuals whose issues arise in the context of ultimate meanings and concerns, clergy engage in pastoral care, a ministry of soul care (Clebsch and Jackle 1964, 4). A person struggling with problems related to questions of ultimate meaning and concerns is considered a recipient of pastoral care. According to Mills (2005, 837), issues of ultimate meaning and concern may be interpreted as a range of life difficulties that could jeopardise one's religion, spirituality, and mental health. As a result, pastoral care emphasises helping those who have experienced these difficulties.

Furthermore, it must be stated that the above-mentioned care of souls encompasses more than just soul healing and nurturing, which addresses people's internal or intrinsic characteristics. Rather, according to Mbiti (1991), the soul is a gauge of a person's general well-being and life energy, which is necessary for success and health. Therefore, the emotional, spiritual, mental, and practical support that pastors and other church leaders offer is encompassed in pastoral care. It entails tackling people's and families' psychological, social, and financial difficulties. Pastoral care is a holistic approach that acknowledges the interdependence of the body, mind, and spirit, as noted by Odedokun (2020).

To promote the harmonious blending of life and faith and create a cohesive existence in which one's beliefs are concretely expressed through practical methods, pastoral care is essential. Clinebell (1984, 26). Additionally, it is essential for maintaining the mental health of kids from dysfunctional households, which frequently calls for a multimodal strategy. This is because spirituality supports mental health by helping kids bounce back from hardship. Consequently, the following are some ways that therapy and pastoral care might support children from broken households' mental health.

The Role of Pastoral Care in Emotional Support

Offering emotional assistance to children raised in dysfunctional families is one of the main functions of pastoral care and counselling. Children may experience emotional abandonment, loneliness, or neglect in many dysfunctional families. The stabilising presence of pastoral carers is essential for emotional healing because they provide empathy and nonjudgmental listening (Clinebell, 1984). For kids who might not have access to official mental health services because of social, cultural, or economic constraints, pastoral care plays an especially crucial role (Pargament, 2007). Pastoral carers can greatly reduce feelings of loneliness and hopelessness by supporting family members, particularly children, to feel acknowledged and appreciated (Miller & Cooper, 2020).

The Role of Pastoral Care in Spiritual Healing

Pastoral care promotes spiritual healing in dysfunctional families and provides emotional support. Many children who are dealing with family-related issues feel as though they have lost their purpose or are spiritually disconnected. By assisting people in rediscovering their religion, investigating spiritual practices, and finding their purpose again, pastoral carers help people deal with these problems (Koenig, 2005). Prayer, scripture reading, and introspection are common practices in spiritual healing, which can offer consolation, hope, and a sense of purpose in the face of chaos.

Research has demonstrated that spiritual practices can strengthen coping mechanisms and provide people with a sense of strength during difficult times, supporting the well-established significance of spirituality in mental health (Pargament, 2007). Rekindling a spiritual connection might give children the resilience they need to overcome obstacles in broken families where they may experience pessimism. In this way, pastoral care becomes a healing instrument

for spiritual and emotional rejuvenation.

The Role of Pastoral Counselling in Facilitating Communication and Reconciliation

In dysfunctional families, pastoral counselling is essential for promoting communication and healing. Poor communication, which is frequently typified by miscommunication, accusations, and emotional disengagement, is one of the defining characteristics of dysfunctional families (Minuchin, 1974). To help family members communicate more effectively and express their feelings, pastoral counsellors employ a variety of therapeutic approaches, such as active listening, empathy, and conflict resolution (Benner, 2003). This procedure frequently results in the settlement of protracted disputes and the rebuilding of family trust.

Reconciliation is especially crucial in families when abuse or neglect has shattered ties. In the end, pastoral counselling promotes healing and reconciliation by offering a safe environment for family members to work through past traumas and misunderstandings (Doehring, 2015). The focus on compassion and forgiveness in pastoral therapy is consistent with religious teachings and frequently inspires people to pursue healing and reconciliation, even in the most trying family circumstances (Clinebell, 1984).

The Role of Pastoral Counselling in Promoting Resilience and Personal Growth

Fostering resilience and personal development in children impacted by dysfunction is another important purpose of pastoral care and counselling interventions for children raised in dysfunctional households. By teaching individuals to build emotional resilience amid hardship, pastoral counsellors often help clients reframe their experiences. Pastoral counselling provides a chance for personal development and transformation in dysfunctional households where children may feel stuck in bad behavioural patterns. Pastoral

counselling can also offer advice on setting appropriate boundaries and fostering healthy family interactions. Pastoral counsellors promote personal empowerment by assisting people in recognising their assets and support networks, empowering family members to improve their mental and interpersonal relationships.

Conclusion

The role of pastoral care and counselling in maintaining the mental health of children from dysfunctional households has been studied in this research. Children born into dysfunctional households are far more likely to experience mental health issues, necessitating essential intervention. By providing pastoral care that addressed both emotional and spiritual healing, pastoral care and counselling proved essential for sustaining these children's mental health. Additionally, it should be mentioned that pastoral care and therapy support personal development, resilience, and reconciliation—all of which are critical in ending the dysfunctional cycle. Accordingly, the study recommends that educational institutions, places of worship, and other organisations work together to establish a support system that can recognise children in danger and offer prompt assistance.

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