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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

SUSTAINING FAMILY MENTAL HEALTH: CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES AND RESILIENCE STRATEGIES

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Abstract

Family mental health is increasingly recognised as a cornerstone of overall well-being. Contemporary families face unprecedented challenges, including shifting family structures, economic instability, social isolation, and the pervasive influence of technology. This paper explores the concept of family mental health, its defining components, and the contemporary stressors that affect families globally, with particular focus on African contexts. Evidence from recent studies highlights the roles of communication, parental well-being, emotional support, and conflict resolution in sustaining healthy family dynamics. Practical strategies for promoting resilience and fostering positive mental health outcomes are proposed, emphasising open communication, quality time, digital well-being, and social support. The discussion also underscores the importance of policy, community engagement, and professional services in supporting families. The study concludes that sustaining family mental health requires integrated individual, familial, and societal efforts.

Keywords: family, family relations, mental health, contemporary, resilience

Introduction

Mental health challenges are a growing concern worldwide, with unique manifestations in African societies shaped by cultural, economic, and systemic contexts (Bhugra et al., 2013). Families provide the foundational environment in which individuals learn to cope with stress, develop resilience, and form emotional bonds (Shah & Vallikad, 2010). In contemporary societies, however, families face multiple pressures, including work-life imbalance, digital distractions, economic uncertainties, and global crises (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2018). These stressors threaten both individual and collective well-being, underscoring the need for strategies that sustain family mental health. This paper examines definitions of family and family mental health, outlines key components that underpin healthy family functioning, analyses contemporary challenges, and proposes strategies for fostering resilience.

Conceptualising the Family

The concept of family has evolved across history and cultures. Traditionally, families were defined legally or biologically, but contemporary definitions extend to subjective bonds of belonging and emotional support (Turkish Language Association, 2011). Families can be nuclear, extended, single-parent, blended, or same-sex, reflecting diverse social realities (Anderson, 2014).

Despite this diversity, families remain central to mental health because they provide emotional, practical, and social support (Gökçe, 1976). The stability and functioning of the family have a significant influence on how individuals adapt to stress and sustain well-being.

Family Mental Health

Family mental health refers to the emotional, psychological, and social well-being of the family as a unit. It encompasses both individual and collective functioning, including communication, problem-solving, and resilience (Bergunde et al., 2024). Healthy

families foster supportive relationships, effective conflict resolution, and adaptive coping mechanisms, while disruptions in these processes increase vulnerability to stress and illness (Scully et al., 2020). WHO (2018) emphasises that mental health is not merely the absence of disease, but a state of complete well-being that enables effective role performance, adaptation to change, and harmonious relationships.

Key Components of Family Mental Health

Emotional Support

Emotional support forms the foundation of family mental health. Secure attachments and expressions of empathy create a sense of safety and belonging that protects members from anxiety and depression (Cohen & Wills, 1985). For children, early attachment lays the groundwork for resilience and healthy coping throughout life (Bowlby, 1988). Families that provide consistent care and mutual respect buffer individuals against stress, especially during transitions such as pregnancy or adolescence (Bedaso et al., 2021). Conversely, lack of support leads to isolation and greater vulnerability to psychological distress. Emotional support thus serves as a protective mechanism that strengthens resilience, reinforces trust, and fosters well-being across the family unit.

Communication

Open and positive communication is central to sustaining family well-being. Healthy dialogue fosters self-esteem and reduces depression and anxiety, particularly during adolescence (Alex et al., 2023). Effective communication builds trust, prevents misunderstandings, and strengthens relationships (Guo et al., 2021). Families that engage in respectful listening and validation of feelings create emotionally safe spaces, while poor communication often results in conflict and distance (Olson & Gorall, 2003). Adapting communication styles across generations and contexts further enhances family resilience. Clear, supportive communication ensures that stress is managed collectively and that family bonds remain strong.

Conflict Resolution

How families handle disagreements greatly influences mental health. Constructive conflict resolution, through dialogue, compromise, and respect, reduces stress and strengthens bonds, whereas unresolved disputes increase emotional distress (Cummings & Schatz, 2012). Interparental conflict often predicts children's behavioural and emotional problems, while poorly managed parent–child disputes undermine trust. Families that use healthy strategies, such as problem-solving or negotiated compromise, model resilience and emotional regulation for younger members.

Parental Mental Health

Parental well-being shapes the entire family environment. Parents with stable mental health provide consistency, warmth, and practical guidance, supporting children's emotional regulation (Giallo et al., 2013). In contrast, parental depression or anxiety is linked to inconsistent parenting and elevated risks of child mental illness (Goodman & Gotlib, 1999). Stressors, such as financial strain or work demands, can further undermine parental stability, thereby affecting family dynamics. Promoting parental mental health through self-care, social support, and professional services not only benefits parents but also strengthens children's resilience and the collective mental health of the household.

Stress Management and Coping

Stress is inevitable, but families with adaptive coping strategies are more resilient. Shared problem-solving, mindfulness, and structured routines help maintain stability (Luthar, 2006). Conversely, disruptions such as divorce or financial hardship weaken security and increase distress (Amato, 2000). Parents who model positive coping behaviours teach children emotional regulation and resilience. Engaging in shared coping activities, such as exercise or family rituals, reinforces solidarity. When stress overwhelms a family's resources, professional support becomes crucial. Effective coping ensures that stress is managed collectively, safeguarding both individual and family mental health.

Parenting Styles

Parenting style plays a decisive role in children's outcomes. Authoritative parenting, characterised by warmth, clear expectations, and consistent discipline, promotes resilience, confidence, and emotional well-being (Baumrind, 1991). In contrast, authoritarian approaches may cause fear and low self-esteem, while permissive or neglectful styles often lead to poor self-regulation and behavioral problems. Parenting practices also shape overall family cohesion, influencing how members interact and cope with challenges.

Contemporary Challenges

Evolving Family Structures

Family structures have undergone significant changes, shifting away from traditional nuclear models toward diverse arrangements, including single-parent, blended, and cohabiting households. These new forms often face unique stressors, including reduced financial stability, limited time resources, and weaker social support networks. Research indicates that children in single-parent or blended families may encounter greater risks of academic, behavioural, and emotional challenges compared with those raised by married, biological parents (Anderson, 2014). While many nontraditional families thrive, systemic barriers such as stigma, policy gaps, and economic strain increase their vulnerability. Extended family ties, once a buffer in many cultures, are also weakening due to urbanisation and migration. This reduced communal support places added pressure on parents, particularly mothers, who often shoulder disproportionate caregiving responsibilities.

Economic Stress

Economic pressure remains one of the most pervasive challenges undermining family mental health. Rising costs of living, wage stagnation, and limited access to affordable healthcare and education place an immense strain on households. The family stress model demonstrates how financial hardship cascades into psychological distress among parents, which in turn disrupts effective parenting

practices and negatively affects child development (Conger et al., 1994). Families experiencing poverty are more likely to encounter conflict, inconsistent routines, and elevated risks of depression and anxiety. Economic stress also increases the likelihood of food insecurity, housing instability, and restricted access to social opportunities, further exacerbating vulnerability. Even middle-class families experience financial stress, often driven by debt, unemployment, or inflation. These pressures not only erode resilience but also undermine family cohesion and trust.

Work-Life Imbalance

Balancing professional responsibilities with family obligations has become increasingly difficult in modern societies. Parents, especially mothers, frequently experience the “mental load,” which is the invisible labour of organising childcare, household duties, and family schedules alongside paid work (Umberson&Thomeer, 2020). This imbalance often leads to chronic stress, burnout, and strained relationships. Children may also feel neglected or unsupported when work demands consume parental attention. Dual-income households, although financially beneficial, can heighten role conflicts if responsibilities are not distributed equitably. Remote work has provided flexibility for some, yet blurred boundaries between home and work have intensified pressures for many families. The resulting stress undermines emotional connection and can contribute to conflict, anxiety, and even depression within households. Promoting work-life balance requires both individual strategies, such as setting boundaries, and structural changes, including flexible workplace policies, affordable childcare services, and an equitable distribution of domestic tasks across genders.

Technology and Social Media

Technology and social media have become integral to family life, offering opportunities for connection, learning, and entertainment. Families separated by distance can maintain closeness through digital tools, while children access educational resources online. However,

excessive reliance on technology carries significant risks. Overuse of screens reduces face-to-face interactions, weakening emotional intimacy within families. Social media can expose children and adolescents to cyberbullying, unrealistic comparisons, and addictive behaviours, all of which increase risks of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). Parents also face challenges, as constant connectivity may distract from quality interactions with children. Also, digital fatigue and disrupted sleep patterns erode psychological resilience. Effective digital engagement requires balance, with families encouraged to establish boundaries such as screen-free zones and regular “digital detox” periods.

Violence, Abuse, and Addiction

Domestic violence, child abuse, and substance misuse remain significant threats to family stability and mental health. Exposure to violence creates a climate of fear and mistrust, impairing emotional development in children and increasing the risk of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Substance misuse, whether alcohol, illicit drugs, or prescription medication, further destabilises family systems by straining finances, undermining caregiving, and eroding communication. Children in such environments often assume caregiving roles prematurely or internalise trauma, with long-term consequences for their psychological health. Abuse and addiction also perpetuate cycles of dysfunction, as unresolved trauma is carried into future generations. Families facing these challenges often experience social stigma, making them less likely to seek professional help. Addressing violence and addiction requires integrated approaches that combine prevention, early intervention, counselling, and strong legal frameworks. Creating safe, supportive environments is essential to breaking these cycles and fostering family resilience.

Climate Change

Climate change is increasingly recognised as a psychosocial stressor affecting family mental health. Families face rising anxiety and distress as they worry about environmental crises, future insecurity, and the well-being of children in a changing world (Bhugra et al., 2013). Extreme weather events such as floods, wildfires, and hurricanes not only cause physical destruction but also lead to trauma, displacement, and financial instability. Families forced to migrate due to climate-related disruptions often lose social support networks, compounding feelings of isolation and grief. Children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable, with many developing eco-anxiety or climate grief that undermines optimism and hope for the future.

Strategies for Sustaining Family Mental Health

Effective Communication

Communication is a cornerstone of sustaining family resilience. Regular check-ins, open dialogue, and active listening foster trust, allowing members to express concerns without fear of judgment. Families that practice effective communication are better equipped to manage conflict, share responsibilities, and provide mutual support. Research highlights its protective role, particularly for adolescents, as positive communication enhances self-esteem and reduces risks of anxiety and depression (Olson, 2000). Simple strategies, such as family meetings, the use of empathetic language, and validation of emotions, can transform how families navigate stressors. Importantly, communication must remain adaptive, accounting for generational differences and diverse family structures. Technology, when used constructively, can also enhance communication across geographical distances. Families that prioritise respectful dialogue create emotionally safe spaces where members feel valued. In the long term, strong communication patterns not only improve mental health outcomes but also strengthen the overall cohesion and stability of the family unit.

Consistent Routines

Structured routines provide predictability and security, particularly for children. Regular schedules for meals, schoolwork, and recreational activities help families establish stability in times of uncertainty. Research suggests that consistent routines reduce stress, improve self-regulation, and strengthen emotional bonds among family members (Allen & Finkelstein, 2014). For children, routines provide a sense of safety, thereby enhancing their ability to cope with change and adversity. For parents, predictable schedules reduce cognitive load and allow better time management. Routines also reinforce healthy habits, including sleep hygiene and balanced nutrition, which directly contribute to mental health. Families lacking consistent structures may experience chaos, conflict, or neglect, which can heighten stress levels.

Healthy Lifestyles

Lifestyle choices significantly influence family mental health. A balanced diet, regular exercise, and adequate sleep help reduce the risks of both physical and psychological illnesses. Research demonstrates that dietary improvements and physical activity not only enhance physical health but also alleviate symptoms of depression and anxiety (Jacka et al., 2017). Families that engage in shared physical activities such as walking, sports, or outdoor play benefit from both the physiological and social advantages of exercise. Adequate rest is equally critical, as disrupted sleep patterns undermine emotional regulation and resilience. Encouraging hobbies, mindfulness, and relaxation techniques further supports psychological well-being. The World Health Organisation (2023) emphasises that physical activity reduces the risk of chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disorders and depression, while also strengthening social integration. Families adopting healthy lifestyles therefore protect themselves from the dual burdens of physical illness and psychological strain. Over time, such habits create resilient households capable of adapting to modern challenges.

Digital Well-Being

In an era dominated by screens, managing digital engagement is crucial for sustaining family mental health. While technology supports education and connection, excessive use undermines face-to-face relationships and contributes to stress and anxiety (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). Families can promote digital well-being by establishing boundaries such as screen-free zones in bedrooms or during meals. Regular “digital detox” periods allow members to reconnect offline, strengthening emotional bonds. Parents play a crucial role in modelling healthy technology use, striking a balance between work responsibilities and attentive family interactions. Monitoring children's online activities also protects them from risks such as cyberbullying, harmful content, and digital addiction. At the same time, families can harness technology for positive purposes, including educational resources, telehealth services, and shared recreational activities.

Social Connection

Strong social ties with extended family, friends, and community networks provide essential buffers against stress and isolation. Families embedded in supportive networks exhibit greater resilience during crises and transitions, as external relationships offer emotional, financial, and practical support. Social connection has been shown to reduce loneliness, promote well-being, and even lower mortality risk (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). For children, connections with extended family and peers enhance social skills and provide additional role models. In contrast, social isolation, often linked to urbanisation, migration, or stigma, erodes resilience and increases vulnerability to depression and anxiety. Active participation in community groups, religious institutions, or cultural organisations strengthens family identity and shared values. Social connection also reinforces coping, as families draw strength from collective problem-solving.

Professional Support

Professional intervention is a critical strategy for families struggling with mental health challenges. Counselling, therapy, and psychiatric services provide tools for addressing unresolved conflicts, managing stress, and reducing stigma associated with mental illness. Families that engage with professionals gain structured support for improving communication, parenting practices, and coping strategies (Reupert et al., 2013). Early intervention is crucial, as untreated mental health issues can escalate into chronic conditions that disrupt family functioning. Professional support also extends to group-based interventions, parent education programs, and community-based services that foster resilience at the collective level. Access, however, remains a barrier in many regions, with stigma and limited resources deterring families from seeking help. Public awareness campaigns and policy initiatives that integrate mental health into primary care can improve accessibility.

Conclusion

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 that support family well-being. Sustaining family mental health is not only a private responsibility but a collective social imperative.

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