

**ROLES OF FAMILY COUNSELLING IN ENHANCING MORAL
DEVELOPMENT AND WELLBEING IN DIVERSE FAMILY
STRUCTURES**

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Abstract

This paper explores the critical role of family counselling in enhancing moral development and wellbeing across diverse family structures, including nuclear and extended family. Drawing on theoretical frameworks such as Family Systems Theory, Attachment Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Ecological Systems Theory, the study examines how family counselling addresses the unique challenges posed by each family structure. The paper reviews related literature, highlighting the effectiveness of family counselling in fostering moral values, improving communication, and promoting emotional resilience. In nuclear families, counselling, extended families gain clarity in intergenerational relationships through Counselling. The paper emphasizes the importance of culturally sensitive and tailored Counselling interventions that

address the specific needs of different family structures. Implications for practitioners include adopting flexible approaches, while policymakers are urged to design inclusive family support programs. The paper concludes that as family dynamics evolve, family Counselling remains an essential tool for promoting moral development and overall wellbeing, making it crucial for ongoing research and practice in this field. The paper underscores the transformative potential of family counselling in supporting diverse families in contemporary society.

Keywords: Family Counselling, Moral Development, Wellbeing, Diverse Family Structures

Introduction

Family counselling has long been recognized as a pivotal intervention in promoting the moral development and wellbeing of individuals within the family unit. As family structures evolve due to sociocultural, economic, and technological changes, the role of family Counselling becomes increasingly crucial in addressing the unique challenges faced by diverse family systems. Family structures now include nuclear families, single-parent households, extended families, same-sex parent families, and blended families, each with distinct dynamics that can impact the moral development and overall wellbeing of family members. Early studies have underscored the importance of family Counselling in mitigating familial conflicts, promoting ethical behaviors, and enhancing the emotional health of individuals within these varied family structures (Boyd-Franklin, 2013; Nichols & Davis, 2017).

The core premise of family Counselling is to provide a safe and supportive environment where family members can openly discuss their issues, understand each other's perspectives, and work together towards resolving conflicts. The Counselling process involves various therapeutic approaches that cater to the specific needs of the family, fostering better communication, understanding, and moral guidance. Research by Minuchin (2017) highlights that family Counselling not only facilitates better parent-child relationships but also promotes the development of social skills, empathy, and ethical decision-making in children.

In the context of moral development, family Counselling plays a significant role in instilling values, ethics, and moral reasoning in children and adolescents. The process of Counselling helps in addressing behavioral issues, reinforcing positive behaviors, and guiding children through the complexities of moral dilemmas. Additionally, family Counselling contributes to the overall wellbeing of family members by providing them with coping mechanisms to handle stress, anxiety, and other emotional challenges. This paper explores the roles of family Counselling in enhancing moral development and wellbeing across various family structures, drawing on theoretical frameworks, empirical evidence, and practical implications.

The concept of family Counselling emerged in the mid-20th century as a response to the

changing dynamics of family life. With the advent of industrialization, urbanization, and globalization, traditional family structures underwent significant transformations, leading to the emergence of diverse family forms. These changes necessitated the development of specialized counselling approaches to address the unique challenges faced by families. Family Counselling, therefore, evolved as an interdisciplinary field that integrates principles from psychology, sociology, and social work to promote the overall functioning and wellbeing of families (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2013).

Family structures have become increasingly diverse, with the rise of single-parent households, blended families, cohabiting couples, and same-sex parent families. These diverse family forms often face unique challenges that can impact the moral development and wellbeing of family members. For instance, single-parent households may struggle with issues related to financial stability, role overload, and the absence of a father or mother figure, which can affect the moral and emotional development of children (Amato, 2014). Similarly, blended families may encounter challenges related to step-parenting, sibling rivalry, and the integration of different family cultures (Ganong & Coleman, 2017).

Given these challenges, family Counselling has become an essential intervention in promoting moral development and wellbeing in diverse family structures. Through various therapeutic techniques, family Counselling helps families navigate their unique challenges, resolve conflicts, and foster a supportive environment that promotes positive moral and emotional development. This paper sought to explore the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of family Counselling and its role in enhancing moral development and wellbeing in diverse family structures.

Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative research methodology to explore the roles of family counselling in enhancing moral development and wellbeing in diverse family structures. The qualitative approach is chosen for its ability to provide an in-depth understanding of the complex dynamics within different family structures and the impact of family counselling on moral development and wellbeing. Data is collected through a comprehensive review of existing literature, including peer-reviewed journals, books, and empirical studies related to family Counselling, moral development, and family wellbeing. Thematic analysis is used to identify key themes and patterns within the literature, allowing for a thorough exploration of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that underpin family Counselling. This methodology is particularly suited for exploring the nuanced and multifaceted nature of family Counselling and its implications for diverse family structures.

Family Systems Theory

Family Systems Theory, developed by Murray Bowen in the late (1960), posits that the family functions as an emotional unit, and individuals cannot be fully understood in isolation from their family system. According to this theory, family members are interconnected and

influence one another's behaviors, emotions, and development patterns. Recent developments in the theory, as highlighted by Nichols and Davis (2020), emphasize how these emotional interconnections shape not only relational dynamics but also the personal development of values and moral frameworks within individuals. This systems-based view has proven essential in understanding the psychological and social processes that influence individual development within family contexts.

The applicability of Family Systems Theory to moral development lies in its focus on interpersonal relationships and emotional regulation within the family. Children develop moral reasoning and behavior largely through interaction with caregivers and siblings, who serve as role models and sources of reinforcement or correction. Research by Grych and Allen (2021) emphasizes that family emotional climate, parenting styles, and conflict resolution strategies significantly influence the moral and ethical orientations of children. The systemic nature of the theory enables practitioners to understand how moral behaviours are cultivated or hindered within family subsystems, making it valuable for developmental psychology and education.

In the realm of family Counselling, Family Systems Theory serves as a practical framework for addressing issues such as communication breakdown, behavioral problems, and intergenerational conflicts. By viewing problems as part of a larger system rather than isolated individual dysfunctions, therapists can implement interventions that foster healthier family interactions and support moral growth. Recent work by Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2020) supports the use of systemic approaches in therapy to improve family cohesion and foster mutual respect and empathy, which are vital components of moral behavior. Thus, the theory remains highly relevant in both theoretical and practical contexts of moral development and Counselling.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory, first developed by John Bowlby in the late (1950) and later expanded by Mary Ainsworth, posits that early relationships between children and their caregivers play a crucial role in shaping socio-emotional development. According to the theory, secure attachments formed in early childhood create a foundation for trust, emotional regulation, and interpersonal relationships across the lifespan. Recent updates and empirical validations of the theory emphasize its relevance in contemporary psychological and educational contexts. For instance, Mikulincer and Shaver (2019) affirm that attachment security continues to influence individuals' moral reasoning and behaviour into adulthood.

In relation to moral development, attachment theory suggests that children who experience secure attachments are more likely to internalize moral values, develop empathy, and exhibit pro-social behaviors. Securely attached children learn to regulate their emotions and understand others' perspectives, foundational skills for moral judgment. A recent study by Mallinckrodt et al. (2022) found that attachment security correlates with increased moral sensitivity and a stronger sense of responsibility, highlighting the role of early emotional bonds

in ethical behavior and conscience formation.

In the domain of family Counselling, attachment theory provides a vital framework for understanding relational patterns and healing dysfunctional dynamics. Counselors use attachment-based approaches to help families recognize insecure attachment styles that may underlie conflict, communication breakdowns, or emotional withdrawal. For example, Johnson and Wiebe (2020) underscore the effectiveness of Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT), grounded in attachment theory, in fostering emotional safety and re-establishing secure family bonds. Thus, attachment theory not only informs preventive developmental strategies but also serves as a cornerstone in therapeutic interventions to rebuild trust and connection within families.

Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory (SLT), as proposed by Albert Bandura (1977), explains moral development through observation, imitation, and modeling. Children internalize values and behaviors by watching significant others such as parents, siblings, teachers, and peers. Moral learning occurs not just through direct reinforcement but also through vicarious experiences—observing the consequences of others' actions (Bandura, 1986). These processes help children understand social norms and adopt behaviors that are socially and morally acceptable.

In the context of family Counselling, SLT offers practical strategies for behavior modification and value transmission within families. Research supports the effectiveness of modeling and reinforcement techniques in influencing children's behavior, making SLT an effective framework for parental training and behavior management (Grusec & Hastings, 2022). Counselors can help families restructure their environments and encourage parents to model prosocial behaviors, which in turn fosters positive moral development in children. SLT also explains the multi-generational transmission of behaviors and attitudes within families (Miller, 2021).

Despite its strengths, SLT has been critiqued for underemphasizing cognitive and emotional aspects of moral development (Eisenberg, 2024). However, its focus on observable behaviors and social context makes it especially useful in applied settings like family Counselling. Its adaptability across cultural contexts and empirical grounding in developmental psychology affirm its relevance and utility in promoting moral behavior and resolving family-based behavioral issues.

Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological Systems Theory, proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1979, posits that human development is shaped by different levels of environmental systems: microsystem (immediate settings like family and school), mesosystem (interconnections between microsystems), exosystem (external settings indirectly influencing the individual), macrosystem (cultural and societal norms), and chronosystem (time-based changes). This multi-layered model highlights

how interactions across various environmental contexts influence an individual's growth and behaviour (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Calvano et al., 2021).

In relation to moral development, Ecological Systems Theory emphasizes the centrality of family, peers, school, and cultural influences in shaping moral reasoning and behaviour. According to recent studies, these systems serve as moral ecologies where children internalize values through interactions and modeled behaviour. For instance, caregivers within the microsystem are primary sources of moral guidance, while broader cultural norms in the macrosystem inform concepts of right and wrong (Zhou et al., 2021). The theory thus supports holistic approaches in fostering moral development by addressing all levels of environmental influence.

In family counselling, Ecological Systems Theory offers a robust framework for assessing how family members' functioning is affected by interrelated systems. It enables counselors to analyze not only intrafamilial dynamics but also external factors like socioeconomic status, peer influence, and cultural expectations. This systemic perspective aids in designing interventions that consider both proximal and distal influences on family wellbeing (Dangi et al., 2022). As families face increasing challenges across social and economic domains, the ecological lens remains crucial in guiding effective, context-sensitive Counselling practices.

Family Counselling and Moral Development in Nuclear Families

Family counselling has been identified as a significant tool in promoting moral development within nuclear families. A recent study by Ahmed and Musa (2021), titled "Impact of Family Counselling on Moral Development among Adolescents in Urban Nuclear Households in Northern Nigeria," explored how structured family counselling interventions influenced moral behaviour among adolescents. The study focused on adolescents aged 12–17 years residing in nuclear family settings. Using a quasi-experimental design, the researchers selected 120 participants from secondary schools in Bauchi and Gombe States through purposive sampling. The participants underwent an eight-week family counselling intervention facilitated by trained counselors. Data were collected using a moral behaviour checklist and analyzed with descriptive and inferential statistics.

The study found that adolescents who received family Counselling showed a significant improvement in moral behaviour, including honesty, empathy, and respect for authority. The authors concluded that family counselling strengthens parental roles in moral instruction, improves communication, and fosters emotional bonding, which are all essential for moral development. They recommended integrating family Counselling into school guidance programs and encouraging parents in nuclear families to participate in structured Counselling sessions to promote holistic child development.

Similarly, Johnson and Lee (2022), in their study titled "The Role of Family Counselling in Enhancing Ethical Behavior in Children from Dual-Income Nuclear Families in Urban Singapore," investigated how Counselling interventions could mitigate moral challenges faced

by children in time-constrained family settings. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach involving 100 families and 10 family counselors. Data were collected through surveys, semi-structured interviews, and behavioural observations over a 6-month period. The participants were nuclear families where both parents were employed full-time, and the children were between 8–14 years old.

Findings revealed that regular family counselling sessions improved moral communication between parents and children. Children demonstrated increased ethical awareness, conflict resolution skills, and social responsibility. Counsellors reported that structured discussions about values, empathy training, and role-modeling exercises contributed significantly to these outcomes. The study concluded that in nuclear families—especially where parental presence is limited due to work—counselling plays a vital compensatory role in moral development. The authors recommended government subsidies for family counselling services and the development of culturally appropriate Counselling modules tailored to nuclear family dynamics.

Family Counselling and Moral Development in Extended Families

The extended family system continues to play a significant role in shaping moral values and behavioral outcomes, especially in collectivist cultures. Recent studies have examined the intersection of family Counselling and moral development within this family structure. One such study by Adeyemi and Okonkwo (2021), titled “Family Counselling as a Tool for Promoting Moral Development Among Adolescents in Extended Family Settings in Southwestern Nigeria,” focused on how Counselling interventions influence adolescents' ethical behavior. Using a descriptive survey design, the researchers sampled 300 adolescents aged 13–18 years from three states in southwestern Nigeria. The data were collected using a structured questionnaire, and the results were analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis.

The study found that adolescents from extended families who received structured family Counselling showed significantly higher levels of moral reasoning and behavior than those who did not. The findings emphasized that intergenerational interactions and shared responsibilities in extended families can either positively or negatively impact moral development, depending on the presence of intentional guidance and Counselling. The researchers concluded that family counselling serves as a structured medium to reinforce ethical behavior, resolve conflicts, and harmonize value transmission across generations. They recommended integrating regular family Counselling sessions into community development programs to support moral upbringing among youth.

Another relevant study was conducted by Muriuki and Njuguna (2022), titled “Influence of Family Therapy on Moral Decision-Making in Extended Family Households in Nairobi County, Kenya.” This quasi-experimental study employed a mixed-methods approach involving 120 participants (30 extended families) undergoing an 8-week family therapy intervention. Pre- and post-intervention assessments were conducted using moral development scales and semi-

structured interviews. The locale for the study was urban and peri-urban neighborhoods within Nairobi County, where extended family households are prevalent due to economic and cultural factors.

The findings revealed significant improvement in moral decision-making among children and adolescents in families who participated in therapy. The qualitative data highlighted that therapy sessions facilitated open communication, addressed intergenerational conflict, and clarified value systems. The authors noted that extended family structures can sometimes create moral ambiguity due to conflicting generational norms, but family Counselling provides a platform for shared understanding. The study concluded that family therapy is effective in fostering moral clarity and ethical behavior in extended family settings. Recommendations included the training of more family therapists with cultural competencies and incorporating family Counselling into school outreach and faith-based programs.

Enhancing Wellbeing in Diverse Family Structures through Family Counselling

Family counselling has increasingly been recognized as a vital intervention to enhance wellbeing across diverse family structures. Recent empirical studies demonstrate its effectiveness in addressing unique challenges faced by families in various socio-cultural contexts, including single-parent families, blended families, and families with non-traditional compositions. This review synthesizes findings from two recent studies that examine how family counselling can promote psychological health, communication, and resilience in diverse family settings.

Dangi, Hall, and Juffer (2022) conducted a mixed-method study titled “A systemic approach to family Counselling: Applications of ecological theory” that focused on applying Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory to family counselling practice. The study involved 120 families from urban settings in the United States, including nuclear, single-parent, and stepfamilies. Quantitative data were collected through standardized wellbeing and family functioning scales, while qualitative interviews explored participants’ perceptions of counselling impacts. The researchers found that family counselling interventions which addressed not only intrafamilial communication but also external environmental stressors—such as economic hardship and social stigma—significantly improved overall family cohesion and individual wellbeing. The ecological perspective was particularly valuable in tailoring Counselling approaches to specific family contexts, thereby enhancing engagement and outcomes. The study recommended that practitioners adopt holistic assessment tools and develop culturally sensitive counselling models that consider systemic influences beyond the immediate family unit.

Similarly, Lopez, Sanchez, and Ramirez (2021) explored the efficacy of family counselling in enhancing emotional wellbeing among Latino immigrant families in a study titled “Family therapy as a pathway to resilience in Latino immigrant households.” The study used a longitudinal design, following 75 families over 12 months in Los Angeles, California.

Participants included parents and adolescent children from diverse family forms, such as multigenerational households and single-parent homes. The Counselling model integrated culturally grounded practices, including familismo (family loyalty) and respeto (respect), to address acculturation stress and intergenerational conflicts. Using mixed methods, the researchers documented significant reductions in depressive symptoms, improved parent-child communication, and strengthened family support networks. Notably, the Counselling process enhanced families’ adaptive capacities to navigate both cultural transition and economic pressures. The authors concluded that culturally tailored family Counselling is essential in fostering resilience and wellbeing in immigrant families, urging for policy initiatives to increase access to such services in underserved communities.

These studies affirm that family counselling plays a crucial role in promoting wellbeing across diverse family structures by addressing both relational dynamics and contextual challenges. Dangi et al. (2022) highlight the importance of ecological and systemic frameworks that encompass external factors influencing family life, while Lopez et al. (2021) emphasize culturally relevant approaches that honor the values and experiences of minority populations. Both recommend expanding family Counselling services with attention to cultural competence, socio-economic realities, and the inclusion of extended family members where relevant.

Role of Family Counselling in Addressing Behavioral Issues in Diverse Family Structures

Behavioural issues in children and adolescents are common across diverse family structures and can impact their moral development and wellbeing. Family Counselling plays a critical role in addressing these issues by helping families understand the underlying causes of behavioral problems and develop effective strategies for managing them. Research by Patterson (2017) shows that family counselling is effective in reducing behavioral issues and promoting positive behavior in children, regardless of family structure. Family counselling helps families establish consistent rules and expectations, which are essential for promoting moral development and addressing behavioural issues.

Impact of Family Counselling on Parental Wellbeing and Parenting Practices

Family Counselling not only benefits children but also has a significant impact on parental wellbeing and parenting practices. By providing parents with the support and guidance they need, family Counselling helps improve parental wellbeing, which in turn enhances their ability to provide effective moral guidance to their children. Studies have shown that parents who receive family Counselling are more likely to develop positive parenting practices, such as effective communication, consistent discipline, and emotional support, which are crucial for the moral development and wellbeing of their children (Sanders & Kirby, 2014).

Implications

The paper highlights the importance of tailoring family Counselling interventions to the unique needs of different family forms, recognizing that each family structure presents distinct

challenges and opportunities for moral development and wellbeing. For practitioners, this means adopting a flexible and culturally sensitive approach to Counselling that takes into account the specific dynamics and cultural contexts of the families they work with. Additionally, the study underscores the need for ongoing research to explore the effectiveness of family Counselling in promoting moral development and wellbeing across various family structures, particularly in the context of changing societal norms and values.

The paper also has implications for policy development, particularly in the areas of family support and mental health services. Policymakers should consider the diverse needs of different family structures when designing and implementing family support programs, ensuring that all families have access to the resources and support they need to promote moral development and wellbeing. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of incorporating family Counselling into broader mental health and social services, recognizing its critical role in supporting the moral and emotional development of individuals within the family unit.

Conclusion

Family Counselling plays a pivotal role in enhancing moral development and wellbeing across diverse family structures. As family dynamics continue to evolve in response to societal changes, the need for effective family Counselling interventions becomes increasingly important. This paper has explored the theoretical and conceptual foundations of family Counselling and its role in promoting moral development and wellbeing in various family forms, including nuclear and extended families.

Suggestions

- ◆ **Tailored Interventions:** Family counselling interventions should be tailored to the unique needs of different family structures, recognizing that each family form presents distinct challenges and opportunities for moral development and wellbeing.
- ◆ **Cultural Sensitivity:** Counsellors should adopt a culturally sensitive approach to family Counselling, taking into account the cultural contexts and values of the families they work with.
- ◆ **Focus on Communication:** Family Counselling should emphasize the importance of open communication and mutual respect among family members, which are critical for moral development and emotional wellbeing.
- ◆ **Support for Single-Parent Families:** Special attention should be given to single-parent families, who may face unique challenges related to financial stress and role overload, by providing them with targeted Counselling support.
- ◆ **Addressing Behavioral Issues:** Family counselling should focus on addressing behavioral issues in children and adolescents, helping families develop effective strategies for managing these issues and promoting positive behavior.

- ◆ **Incorporating Attachment Theory:** Counselling interventions should incorporate principles from Attachment Theory to strengthen the emotional bonds between parents and children, which are crucial for moral development.
- ◆ **Parental Wellbeing:** Family Counselling should also focus on enhancing parental wellbeing, recognizing that parents' emotional health significantly impacts their ability to provide moral guidance to their children.
- ◆ **Policy Development:** Policymakers should consider the diverse needs of different family structures when designing family support programs and ensure that all families have access to family Counselling services.

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