

A Critical Analysis of Family Interactions on Children's Mental Health and Emotional Balance

Mirza Elmy Safira, Masfufah, Yuliastutik

Sunan Giri University of Surabaya, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Children's mental health is a multidimensional issue that is strongly influenced by the quality of family interactions. This study aims to examine in depth how family interactions affect children's emotional balance and psychological state. Through a literature review approach, it was found that healthy communication patterns, emotional closeness, and consistent support from parents have a strong correlation with children's stable mental state. In contrast, authoritarian parenting patterns, domestic violence and conflict between family members act as the main predictors of emotional disorders such as anxiety, stress and depression in children. These findings suggest that the family is not only a physical place to live, but also a key ecosystem for shaping children's mental health. Attention to family relationships needs to be prioritized in the design of policy interventions and mental health education. This research contributes to enriching the academic literature on the systemic approach to understanding children's psychosocial problems and opens new space for the development of family-based interventions to prevent mental disorders from an early age.

INTRODUCTION

The family is the first institution that children are introduced to from birth and becomes the main foundation in the formation of their personality and psychological development. Within the family environment, children experience an early socialization process that determines how they understand themselves and the world around them. Warm, loving and consistent interactions between family members can shape a child's sense of security, healthy self-esteem and self-confidence. In contrast, disharmony in communication, harsh parenting patterns, or lack of emotional support from parents can trigger prolonged psychological pressure (Repetti et al., 2015). Psychological stress can disrupt a child's emotional development and potentially foster mental problems.

Attention to the relationship between family dynamics and children's mental health has increased due to the high prevalence of psychological disorders in early age. When the house, which is supposed to be the safest place, becomes a source of stress and discomfort, children tend to have difficulty expressing emotions, resolving conflicts, and building healthy social relationships outside the family. Factors such as parental divorce, household violence,

or parental emotional absence have been shown to have a direct impact on a children's psychological state. Dysfunctional family environments have the potential to cause disorders such as anxiety, depression, and behavioral disorders (Peña & Brioso, 2014).

Within the framework of developmental psychology, the quality of family interactions is an important indicator in seeing how children form healthy mindsets and emotions. Research shows that children who grow up in an emotionally supportive environment tend to have higher resilience to external pressures. In an increasingly complex society, many families face economic, social and cultural pressures that disrupt their internal interaction patterns. When parents face financial difficulties or other social problems, their attention to their child's emotional needs may suffer. This impacts on children's psychological stability, which sometimes does not receive enough attention because symptoms are often hidden or mistaken for delinquency (Houlberg et al., 2012). In fact, such symptoms may be a response to internal tensions within the family, caused by external pressures faced by parents. The psychological condition of the child is an important concern to deal with any emotional problems that may arise.

* Corresponding author, email address: mirza.elmysafira@gmail.com

It is important to further examine how diverse family dynamics can have a significant effect on children's mental health. A literature study is a relevant approach to compile and analyze existing scientific findings, in order to gain an in-depth and comprehensive understanding. This understanding is not only important for academics, but also for social practitioners, educators and policy makers in order to formulate a more comprehensive approach in supporting children's psychological development.

One of the main problems identified in the literature is the lack of parental attention to children's emotional needs, especially in families under economic pressure or conflictual relationships. According to research by McLeod and Shanahan (1993), children living in a full of pressure households tend to show higher levels of anxiety and depression. When communication in the family is minimal or only authoritative, children find it difficult to channel feelings and experience obstacles in the development of emotion regulation.

Another problem that is no less serious is the inconsistency of parenting patterns, especially in families that are divided or structurally unstable. Research by Amato and Keith (1991) shows that children from divorced or frequent change of residence families have a higher risk of emotional adjustment disorders. Uncertainty and sudden changes in family structure can create psychological insecurity that interferes with the development of children's identity and self-confidence.

In a violent family environment, whether physical or verbal, children are often in a very vulnerable position. Not only are they direct victims, but they also experience secondary trauma that takes root in their memory and affects their perception of interpersonal relationships. Research by Margolin and Gordis (2000) revealed that children who witnessed household violence showed significant post-traumatic stress symptoms, even more severe than direct victims of violence. This indicates that exposure to family conflict has a profound impact on children's mental state.

Children are the most vulnerable part of the population and the sustainability of their mental health is a benchmark for the quality of future generations. Family interactions have a great capacity to shape children's emotional and cognitive structures from an early age, which in turn affects their future social, academic and professional lives. When those interactions are disrupted by internal tensions, open conflict or emotional neglect, children face difficulties building a solid sense of trust in themselves and others.

As the social challenges and pressures of modern life increase, the quality of parenting patterns and relationships within the family become increasingly crucial to be examined. Many children experience psychological disorders without being properly identified due to the cultural cover-up of mental health issues within the family. There needs to be a broader, evidence-based awareness of how family dynamics can be both a foundation and a risk to children's mental health.

This study aims to identify and review in depth how the form and quality of family interactions can affect children's mental health based on findings from previous literature studies. By integrating research results across time and regions, this research is expected to contribute to building a solid conceptual foundation for the development of social and educational interventions that are more relevant, responsive and centered on children's emotional needs.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a library study method to examine the relationship between family dynamics and children's mental health. The literature study was chosen because it allows researchers to collect, evaluate and synthesize various research results and existing theories on the topic under study. This approach does not rely on just one source of information, but utilizes a variety of credible academic documents, such as scientific journals, family psychology theory books, research institute reports, and previous dissertation results. Literature study is very useful when the issue under study is complex and multidimensional, such as the influence of family interaction on children's emotional balance. As explained by Merriam (1998), a qualitative approach allows researchers to explore in depth the meanings and processes that occur in a particular social context.

In its implementation, this method follows a systematic procedure that includes the identification of relevant literature, sorting based on credibility and focus of research, and thematic analysis of document content. The analytical technique used was content analysis, with an emphasis on finding patterns, relationships and main thematic categories relating to forms of family interaction and their implications for children's psychological conditions. This method also supports a theoretical synthesis approach that allows the integration of various findings to gain a comprehensive understanding. As suggested by Hart (1998), literature review is not just a summary of information, but also a critical evaluative process to build a conceptual foundation for scientific research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Children's psychological well-being grows from the relationships they build early on with those closest to them, especially within the family. The interpersonal relationships that take place within the household become an early mirror of how children view themselves, others, and the world around them. The family is the first environment where children learn about emotions, communication, and social relationships (Baker et al., 2011). A house filled with warmth and appreciation can form a positive mindset that encourages children to grow up feeling loved and appreciated (Fitness, 2013). Children who feel accepted and valued within their family tend to have a healthy self-concept and are better able to develop healthy relationships with others outside the family. This is the initial foundation for the formation of a healthy self-concept and trust in the social environment (Stafford et al., 2016). A supportive family environment not only aids emotional development, but also strengthens a child's overall psychological well-being.

In the early stages of life, parents' responses to children's expressions of emotion form an internal map of how emotions should be recognized, managed and expressed. When such responses are consistently and empathetically present, the child will learn that their feelings are valid and acceptable. When parents provide consistent, empathetic and understanding responses, children learn that their feelings are legitimate and worth expressing. In contrast, when the responses received contain rejection, anger, or emotional absence, children may experience confusion in understanding and managing their feelings. As a result, children's ability to establish healthy interpersonal relationships may be compromised in the future (Suldo & Fefer, 2013). The child may struggle to recognize and express feelings in a healthy way, and have difficulty regulating their emotions when faced with disturbing situations.

The family not only acts as a place to grow physically, but is also the main training ground for children's psychosocial development. Daily interactions between family members establish communication patterns that will carry over into the next phase of life. Through conversation, reprimands, touch, and emotional presence, children learn the meaning of trust, empathy, and self-control. These interactions also indirectly shape children's readiness to face social pressure and other emotional challenges outside the house environment (Sheehan, 2017). Children raised in a loving and supportive environment typically exhibit greater resilience to stress and social challenges. The family becomes the primary refuge and training ground for children's psychosocial development.

The dynamics in family relationships can be both a blessing and a challenge for children's emotional growth. In harmonious families, interpersonal interactions are often a source of strength that sustains children in the face of adversity. In families that are conflict-ridden, unstable or emotionally unresponsive, children tend to show psychological symptoms that lead to mental health disorders. The child may struggle to develop healthy social skills and often feels isolated or lacks confidence. It is important to see the family not just as a social institution, but as a crucial terrain that shapes children's mental health from an early age (Pannilage, 2017). Communication behaviors, the way parents handle conflict, and the emotional support provided greatly affect children's psychological well-being. Families that are able to provide space for healthy emotional expression and build strong bonds will provide important provisions for children to face the challenges of life in the future.

Family interactions play an important role in shaping children's mental health and emotional balance. The family is the first and main environment that shapes a child's social experience. This is where children first learn about affection, acceptance, and emotional regulation. Loving, stable, and consistent forms of interaction provide a strong foundation for children to develop a sense of emotional security. In contrast, communication that is full of tension, excessive criticism, or even neglect, can leave a deep psychological imprint. The results of research from Bowlby (1998) show that secure attachment built through positive interactions with parents is strongly correlated with children's future emotional regulation and mental resilience.

Parenting style is a concrete form of parental interaction with children that directly affects their psychological state. Baumrind (1991) classified parenting styles into four categories: authoritarian, permissive, authoritative and neglectful. Each of these parenting styles has a different impact on a child's emotional and social well-being. Of these four styles, the authoritative style, which combines discipline with warmth, has been found to be most supportive of children's mental health. Children raised in this style showed lower levels of anxiety and depression and had healthier social relationships. In contrast, authoritarian and neglectful styles are associated with an inability to manage stress and low self-esteem. Parenting dynamics are not just a technical issue, but also largely determine the psychological climate in the family. A healthy and balanced parenting dynamic will create an environment that supports children's psychological development, helping them feel safe, valued and ready to face the outside world with confidence.

One form of interaction that is crucial is the quality of communication between family members. Open communication, full of empathy, and free from judgment encourages children to feel valued and understood. Children who grow up in communicative families tend to be more open in expressing emotions and seeking help when facing psychological pressure. Communication is the bridge that connects children's emotional needs with the support provided by parents. According to research by Olson et al. (2003), families that practice functional communication tend to produce children with lower levels of anxiety and depression. In contrast, closed or conflicted communication is a source of anxiety and emotional alienation for children. Building healthy communication in the family is not just about listening, but also involves the ability to understand and respond wisely to children's emotional needs.

Emotional stability in the family is also a crucial factor in shaping children's mental resilience. Children are very sensitive to the emotional dynamics at home, especially the interactions between parents. A house environment filled with parental arguments, verbal violence, or unresolved tensions can cause children to experience chronic stress. McLeod et al. (1993) showed that persistent family conflict is associated with an increased risk of anxiety disorders and depression in school-age children. Long-term unaddressed tension will become a psychological burden that weakens the child's mental resilience. These experiences can reduce children's ability to regulate emotions and interact socially. Such situations often leave children feeling emotionally insecure, which in turn affects their entire spectrum of psychological development. Maintaining emotional stability in the family is not only important for the harmony of the household, but also determines the mental and emotional future of the child.

Relationship patterns between siblings also play an important role in family dynamics. Supportive interactions between siblings can be a significant source of emotional support, especially when children are experiencing pressure outside the home. When these relationships are filled with unhealthy competition, unmanaged jealousy, or physical and verbal violence, these potential conflicts can be a source of additional stress. Feinberg et al. (2000) note that the quality of sibling relationships can either strengthen or weaken a child's emotional resilience to external pressure. It is important for parents to co-direct and facilitate healthy relationships among their children. Parents need to teach the value of cooperation, empathy and healthy conflict resolution early on. A fair and consistent approach in resolving disputes between siblings also helps prevent the development of jealousy or injustice.

The roles of fathers and mothers in their interactions with their children have different but complementary impacts. Fathers who are emotionally involved and consistent in their children's lives contribute to the development of children's self-confidence and autonomy. Meanwhile, the presence of an emotionally responsive and loving mother strengthens the aspects of affection and emotional attachment. Research conducted by Lamb (2004) showed that children with active presence of both parents emotionally showed better adaptation to stress and social problems. Role balance in the family is an important foundation for children's mental health. The balance of roles between fathers and mothers in providing emotional support enriches children's experiences and forms a strong foundation for their long-term mental health and psychological well-being.

Interactions based on respect for children's individuality, such as recognition of their opinions and encouragement to be independent, have a positive effect on forming a healthy self-concept. When parents provide space for children to express their opinions, make choices, and demonstrate their uniqueness, children will feel that they are valued as whole individuals. Children who feel valued for their opinions tend to grow into individuals who have a high sense of self-confidence and internal control. According to Deci and Ryan (2000), respect for children's basic needs such as autonomy and competence is an important key in supporting optimal psychological development. When family interactions fail to accommodate this, children may grow up in identity confusion or emotional over-dependence. It is important for families to not only provide love and protection, but also build patterns of interaction that support independence and respect for the uniqueness of each child.

An imbalance in power relations between parents and children can also cause psychological pressure. Children will grow into individuals who tend to wait for direction or approval from others. In families that emphasize obedience without dialogue, children tend to grow up with high anxiety about judgment and failure. This often results in a pattern of avoidance of challenges and fear of making decisions. On the other side, a family that fosters trust and mutual respect can shape children who are more resilient and courageous. According to Grusec and Goodnow (1994), value internalization in children will only be successful if accompanied by explanations and discussions that encourage children's active engagement in the value formation process. The balance of power relations in the family can shape healthy relationships and support children's overall moral and psychological development.

Emotional support from the family in the face of difficult times, such as the death of a family member, divorce, or changes in social environment, is instrumental in protecting children's mental health. Children who receive emotional support when facing traumatic experiences show better adaptability. Luthar and Cicchetti (2000) emphasize that families that are able to provide a sense of security and emotional connectedness are protective factors in dealing with psychosocial pressure. Children who receive this kind of support show better adaptation skills, including the ability to calm themselves down, understand their emotions, and find meaning from traumatic experiences. Without such support, children are vulnerable to unresolved trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder. This support doesn't always have to be in the form of solutions or advice, but can include consistent presence, attentive listening, and validation of the child's feelings.

Openness to the expression of negative emotions in the family is also an important aspect of healthy interactions. When children do not feel free to show sadness, anger or disappointment, these emotions tend to be suppressed and unchanneled. In the long run, this can lead to psychosomatic disorders or uncontrolled emotional outbursts. Saarni (1999) states that the development of emotional intelligence in children is highly dependent on their opportunity to learn to identify and manage emotions in a healthy manner within the family environment.

Parents' active engagement in their children's daily lives is a tangible form of interaction that has an impact on psychological stability. Quality time spent with children, such as dinner together, weekend activities, or simply talking before bed, can create a strong emotional bond. It also provides a space for children to share stories, express feelings, and receive validation from parents. According to research by Amato and Rivera (1999), the intensity of parental engagement is positively correlated with children's emotional well-being. Engagement is not just physical, but reflects a consistent emotional presence.

Not all families have adequate resources to create healthy interactions. Economic factors, job stress and other social pressures can limit parents' time and energy to interact with their children. Interactions with children tend to be limited, rushed, or conducted without sufficient emotional awareness. This often results in reactive parenting patterns or even emotional neglect. Rutter (1990) warns that children's psychological vulnerability will increase if there is no adequate support system in the family. Social interventions and public policies are essential to help families create environments that support children's mental health.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that the quality of family interactions is not the result of a single factor, but a combination of interacting emotional, social and structural aspects. Cross-disciplinary research combining developmental psychology, family sociology and educational science is urgently needed to provide a comprehensive understanding of these relationships. Healthy and supportive interactions within families are a main foundation for a mentally and emotionally resilient generation. Increasing the quality of relationships within the household should be a priority in the overall child welfare development agenda.

CONCLUSION

Family interactions have been shown to play a central role in shaping children's mental health and emotional balance. Warm communication, parental emotional presence, and consistent and responsive parenting patterns create an environment that supports children's healthy psychological development. In contrast, relational tensions, negative communication patterns, and verbal and physical abuse can be serious risk factors for the emergence of mental disorders such as depression, anxiety, and behavioral disorders in children. Extensive research shows that the quality of relationships within the family system is a crucial foundation for children's self-identity formation, emotional regulation, and psychological resilience in facing life's challenges.

The findings provide critical insights for educators, policy makers, and mental health practitioners on the importance of viewing the family as the basic unit of intervention in child mental health issues. Programs that focus on strengthening family communication, parenting skills training, and increasing emotional sensitivity within the family can be effective preventive approaches. This study also emphasizes that children's mental health cannot be separated from the dynamics of interpersonal relationships that occur at home, so individualized approaches in child psychotherapy should also be accompanied by the involvement of the family as a whole system.

Collaborative efforts across sectors are needed to develop a sustainable, communities-based and evidence-based family assistance system. Further research that examines the sociocultural aspects of family interaction patterns will enrich understanding and formulate more adaptive policies. Training for educators and school counselors in identifying symptoms of mental disorders that may stem from family conflict needs to be expanded, so that treatment can be carried out earlier and more thoroughly.

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