

Psychodynamic-Based Family Counseling Strategies in Building Healthy Family Communication Patterns

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Abstract

Closed, blaming, and pressure-filled family communication patterns are closely associated with various psychological problems, ranging from adolescent depression to anxiety and emotional mental disorders. Empirical studies on family communication are generally not framed with psychodynamic theory, while psychodynamic studies remain conceptual–historical and have not been operationalized into applicable counseling strategies. This study aimed to identify psychodynamic principles relevant to family communication patterns and formulate psychodynamically based family counseling strategies to build healthy family communication. A qualitative approach was used with the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method following PRISMA guidelines, searching Google Scholar, Garuda, SINTA, ScienceDirect, ERIC, ProQuest, and PsycINFO for articles published between 2015 and 2025, analyzed through content and thematic analysis. Results showed that problematic family communication patterns are manifestations of unconscious dynamics, unresolved object relations, pathogenic introjection, and ego defense mechanisms. Based on these findings, five counseling strategies were formulated: building a working alliance and holding environment, exploring family-of-origin history, fostering insight, managing transference–countertransference, and addressing defense mechanisms, implemented through genogram, associative exploration, interpretation, and working through techniques. These strategies are projected to break intergenerational transmission of maladaptive emotional patterns and build more open, empathetic, and reflective family communication.

Keywords: *Family Counseling; Psychodynamic Approach; Family Communication.*



A. INTRODUCTION

The family is the smallest social unit and the primary environment for character formation and psychological development of individuals (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Within the family, communication serves as a bridge connecting the thoughts, feelings, and needs of each family member; therefore, the quality of communication established determines the degree of cohesion, sense of security, and psychological well-being of all family members. When communication is open, warm, and mutually respectful, the family becomes a protective space that fosters emotional regulation and self-confidence in children and adolescents. Conversely, communication patterns that are closed, blaming, or pressure-filled have the potential to become a source of long-term psychological risk for family members.

Various recent findings indicate that family communication issues are not merely trivial domestic matters, but are closely related to the mental health of the younger generation. Djayadin & Munastiwi (2021) found that family communication patterns influence children's mental health conditions, especially during stressful

periods such as a pandemic. Research on adolescents using the Revised Family Communication Pattern and Children Depression Inventory demonstrated a significant relationship between family communication patterns and the incidence of depression in adolescents (Astuti et al., 2024). Similar findings were reported by Fajariyah (2024), who confirmed the association between family roles and communication patterns with adolescent emotional mental disorders, as well as Salam and Purwanto (2025), who showed the impact of family communication patterns on adolescent emotional maturity. Saputri, Murtoyo & Amalia (2022) found the influence of family communication patterns on depression levels in the elderly, while Judodihardjo, Satiadarma & Soetikno (2024) demonstrated the role of family functioning as a moderator between overprotective parenting and adolescent anxiety. In divorced families, disrupted communication also hinders the development of a healthy child self-concept (Akmarani, Lukmantoro, & Rahmiaji, 2023). This series of findings confirms that dysfunctional family communication is not merely a momentary interaction disturbance, but rather the root of deeper and more sustained psychological issues.

Family counseling presents itself as a professional assistance effort involving the entire family system, not just individuals showing symptoms, with the aim of improving relational and communication patterns so that the potential of each family member can develop optimally (Syarqawi, 2019). Family counseling has evolved from various theoretical orientations structural, systemic-Bowenian, behavioral, humanistic, to psychodynamic each offering different perspectives in understanding and intervening in family problems (Corey, 2013; Gladding, 2014).

The psychodynamic approach occupies a distinctive position because it emphasizes the role of the unconscious mind, internal conflicts, and childhood experiences in shaping ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving in adulthood. In the family context, current relationships among members are largely colored by unconscious emotional patterns and internalized past experiences, consistent with the concept of object relations. Psychodynamic counselors pay close attention to each family member's past experiences, including the phenomenon of pathogenic introjection, and seek to encourage the emergence of insight as a pathway to improving emotional exchange (Zohrah, 2015). Bion (1961) affirmed that the family is not merely a collection of individuals, but rather a unity with its own dynamics and emotions that largely function at an unconscious level.

The relationship between psychodynamics and family communication lies in the assumption that apparent communication patterns ways of speaking, remaining silent, avoiding, or blaming each other are actually manifestations of psychological dynamics that are not fully conscious. Anxiety inherited across generations, unspoken expectations, and relational patterns internalized since childhood can recur in the form of communication patterns that are difficult to change only through approaches targeting overt behavior alone.

Literature review reveals three groups of tendencies: empirical studies examining the communication–psychological outcomes relationship but rarely using

a psychodynamic framework; descriptive studies depicting family experiences but not yet formulating applicable counseling strategies; and conceptual studies comparing counseling approaches but not yet operationalizing psychodynamic principles into concrete intervention strategies. A research gap exists: not many studies have bridged psychodynamics as a theoretical framework and family communication patterns as improvement targets within a single, complete strategy formulation. The novelty of this article lies in the formulation of family counseling strategies that are explicitly grounded in core psychodynamic constructs unconscious dynamics, object relations, pathogenic introjection, cross-generational transmission as a framework for building healthy family communication.

The objectives of this study are: (1) to identify and analyze psychodynamic principles relevant to the formation of communication patterns within the family; (2) to formulate psychodynamic-based family counseling strategies that can be used to build healthy family communication patterns; and (3) to provide a conceptual contribution to the development of family counseling practice.

B. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to identify, analyze, and synthesize literature regarding psychodynamic-based family counseling strategies in building healthy family communication patterns. SLR was selected because it is capable of producing knowledge synthesis in a systematic, transparent, and accountable manner.

The search process referred to PRISMA guidelines covering four stages: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and determination of included articles. The databases used included Google Scholar, Garuda, SINTA, ScienceDirect, ERIC, ProQuest, and PsycINFO. The search strategy used a combination of Indonesian and English keywords with Boolean operators: family counseling, psychodynamic approach, family communication. Inclusion criteria comprised scientific articles, proceedings, books, theses, and dissertations discussing related topics, published between 2015–2025, available in full text, and written in Indonesian or English. Articles that were irrelevant, incomplete, non-credible, or duplicate were excluded.

Data analysis employed content analysis and thematic analysis through stages of data reduction, coding, categorization, narrative presentation, synthesis, and conclusion drawing. The focus of synthesis was connecting psychodynamic concepts with family communication findings to formulate counseling strategies. Trustworthiness was maintained through source triangulation by comparing findings from various literature sources.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Family Communication Problems

Problematic communication patterns include: closed and defensive patterns (avoiding sensitive topics, concealing feelings), blaming patterns (positioning one

party as the source of problems), as well as pressure-filled and overly controlling patterns such as overprotective parenting that contributes to adolescent anxiety (Judodihardjo et al., 2024). These patterns recur consistently from one moment of conflict to the next, indicating deeper root causes than merely communication skills deficits.

2. Causal Analysis Based on Psychodynamic Theory

The psychodynamic approach views that problematic communication patterns are manifestations of unconscious dynamics brought by each family member into current relationships. Object relations theory explains that early experiences with significant figures form mental representations of self and others that are projected into adult relationships. When early experiences are colored by neglect, rejection, or emotional invalidation, similar patterns tend to recur.

Pathogenic introjection explains how values, expectations, and anxieties from previous generations are internalized and unconsciously inherited by the next generation through daily communication (Zohrah, 2015). Ego defense mechanisms denial, projection, displacement, splitting also play a role: family members who cannot tolerate anxiety, guilt, or helplessness tend to project these feelings onto others, giving rise to blaming patterns. Bion (1961) affirmed that these dynamics also occur at the group level, where the family operates based on shared unconscious anxiety rather than rational consideration.

Thus, closed, blaming, and pressure-filled communication patterns are not standalone issues, but rather expressions of unconscious dynamics, unresolved object relation legacies, and collectively operating ego defense mechanisms.

3. Psychodynamic-Based Family Counseling Strategies

Based on this analysis, five strategies were formulated:

- a. Building a Working Alliance and Holding Environment – Creating a safe and non-judgmental space for all family members to express hidden feelings.
- b. Exploring Family-of-Origin History – Tracing childhood experiences and relational patterns with primary caregivers to recognize cross-generational pattern inheritance.
- c. Fostering Insight – Helping the family connect current communication patterns with their underlying psychological dynamics, thereby growing empathic understanding of oneself and others (Zohrah, 2015).
- d. Managing Transference and Countertransference – Utilizing feelings that arise in counseling sessions anger, disappointment, need for validation as a window to understand unconscious relational patterns.
- e. Addressing Defense Mechanisms – Helping the family recognize the use of denial, projection, or displacement, then gradually directing toward more direct and responsible emotional expression.

Implementation of Psychodynamic Techniques

- a. Genogram and Family History Assessment – A visual diagram mapping

relational patterns, conflicts, and emotional closeness across generations.

- b. Associative Exploration – Encouraging open storytelling without strict direction to capture recurring themes, contradictions, and implicit matters.
- c. Interpretation – Connecting overt behavior with hidden dynamics gradually and adjusted to the family's readiness.
- d. Utilization of Transference – Using attitudes directed toward the counselor or among family members as a mirror of recurring relational patterns.
- e. Working Through – A repeated process to test and strengthen new understanding into daily communication patterns until more reflective responses are formed.
- f. Consolidation and Termination – Ensuring new patterns have been internalized and equipping the family with the ability to recognize and respond to old patterns if they re-emerge.

4. Impacts on Healthy Family Communication

Implementation of these strategies is projected to produce: (1) a shift from reactive–defensive communication to reflective and responsible communication through awareness of the psychological roots of behavior; (2) interruption of cross-generational transmission of maladaptive emotional patterns; (3) improved emotional regulation and self-confidence thanks to a safe holding environment; and (4) reduced chronic conflict along with decreased use of unhealthy defense mechanisms. A more cohesive family climate functions as a protective factor against various mental health problems.

Counselors need to be equipped with a deep understanding of core psychodynamic concepts to be able to reach the root of problems, not merely behavioral symptoms. Genograms and family-of-origin exploration need to be systematically integrated into assessment. Given that this study is conceptual in nature, further research in the form of empirical studies quasi-experimental or longitudinal case studies is needed to directly test the effectiveness of these strategies. Counseling education curricula need to strengthen psychodynamic content as an operationalizable framework, not merely historical knowledge.

D. CONCLUSION

Family communication problems closed patterns, mutual blaming, pressure-filled patterns are not merely surface-level interaction disturbances, but rather manifestations of unconscious dynamics, unresolved object relations, pathogenic introjection, ego defense mechanisms, and cross-generational transmission of emotional patterns. The formulated counseling strategies include building a safe space, exploring the past, fostering awareness, managing the therapeutic relationship, and addressing psychological defenses, implemented through genograms, associative exploration, interpretation, and working through. These strategies are projected to be capable of breaking the chain of maladaptive pattern inheritance and building more open, empathetic, and responsible family communication. Further empirical research

is needed to directly prove its effectiveness.

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