

THE EFFECT OF FAMILY COUNSELING SERVICES ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS AND PROBLEMATIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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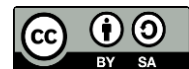
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Abstract

Family dynamics play a crucial role in shaping children's behavior and academic success. Conflicts between parents and children can disrupt these dynamics, particularly for elementary school students with behavioral challenges. This study examines the effect of family counseling services on improving the relationship between parents and problematic elementary school students. The research aims to evaluate whether structured family counseling can enhance communication, mutual understanding, and collaboration between parents and their children. A quasi-experimental research design was employed, utilizing pre-test and post-test measures with a control group. The sample consisted of 50 families selected through purposive sampling, divided equally into experimental and control groups. Data were collected using relationship quality questionnaires, observational records, and structured interviews. The results indicate a significant improvement in the parent-child relationship within the experimental group compared to the control group. Participants reported enhanced communication, reduced conflict, and increased emotional bonding after engaging in the family counseling sessions. These findings suggest that family counseling is an effective intervention for addressing relational issues and fostering a supportive environment for elementary school students with behavioral difficulties. The study highlights the importance of family-centered approaches in educational and developmental interventions.

Keywords: Family Counseling, Parent-Child Relationship, Elementary Education, Behavioral Challenges, Communication Skills



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INTRODUCTION

The quality of parent-child relationships is a cornerstone of children's emotional, social, and academic development. In elementary school, children begin to face a range of challenges, including peer interactions, academic pressure, and behavioral regulation (Zmora, 2021). For students with problematic behaviors, these challenges often lead to strained relationships with their parents, further exacerbating the difficulties faced at home and school. The lack of effective communication, unresolved conflicts, and mutual frustration often create a cycle of negative interactions, impeding the child's ability to thrive in a supportive environment (O'Connell, 2021).

Family counseling services offer a promising approach to addressing these relational challenges by fostering open communication and emotional connection between parents and children (Brandi, 2020). Rooted in therapeutic principles, family counseling provides tools to resolve conflicts, build empathy, and create a collaborative approach to problem-solving. While interventions targeting parent-child dynamics have gained attention in educational and psychological fields, the specific impact of family counseling on elementary school students with behavioral problems remains underexplored. The study of this dynamic is critical in understanding how to build supportive home environments that complement educational efforts (Babaheidarian, 2021).

The increasing prevalence of behavioral issues among elementary school students calls for innovative solutions that address root causes rather than merely managing symptoms (Stifani, 2021). Schools, as critical stakeholders in children's development, can play a pivotal role in facilitating family-centered interventions. This study aims to contribute to the growing discourse on family counseling as an essential component of holistic educational support systems, emphasizing its role in strengthening parent-child relationships (Bonnington, 2020).

Problematic behaviors among elementary school students present significant challenges for both families and schools (Mahapatro, 2021). Parents often struggle to manage these behaviors effectively, leading to frustration, punitive measures, and strained relationships. These relational difficulties, if left unaddressed, can result in long-term negative outcomes for the child, including emotional withdrawal, academic underachievement, and difficulty in forming healthy social relationships. Despite efforts to address behavioral issues through school-based interventions, many of these initiatives fail to involve parents as active participants in the child's developmental process (Münch, 2020).

A critical gap exists in understanding the relational dynamics between parents and children with behavioral difficulties. Existing interventions often focus on modifying the child's behavior without addressing the underlying familial factors contributing to these issues (Hrusa, 2020). The lack of parental involvement in traditional approaches to behavioral management limits the effectiveness of these interventions, as the home environment remains a significant influence on the child's behavior. This highlights the need for strategies that simultaneously target both the child and the parent to create lasting change (Talabi, 2020).

The challenge of improving parent-child relationships in the context of behavioral difficulties requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond conventional disciplinary strategies (Thai, 2021). Family counseling emerges as a potential solution, offering structured opportunities for parents and children to address relational conflicts collaboratively. However, empirical studies evaluating the effectiveness of such interventions in elementary education

settings are limited, leaving educators and policymakers without sufficient evidence to advocate for broader implementation (Puri, 2020).

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the impact of family counseling services on improving the quality of relationships between parents and problematic elementary school students (Calip, 2021). By focusing on this dynamic, the research aims to determine whether structured counseling sessions can lead to measurable improvements in communication, conflict resolution, and emotional connection between parents and their children. The study seeks to provide empirical evidence supporting the integration of family counseling into school-based interventions for students with behavioral challenges (Liu, 2020).

The study also aims to identify specific aspects of the counseling process that contribute most significantly to positive outcomes (Ghorbani, 2020). This includes exploring how communication techniques, emotional awareness, and collaborative problem-solving strategies introduced during counseling sessions translate into improved interactions at home. The findings are expected to inform best practices for implementing family counseling programs in elementary schools, with a particular emphasis on their adaptability to diverse family structures and cultural contexts (Pearson, 2020).

In addition to addressing immediate relational challenges, this research aspires to highlight the broader implications of strengthening parent-child relationships through counselling (Dehlendorf, 2021). By demonstrating the long-term benefits of improved familial interactions, the study seeks to advocate for the inclusion of family counseling as a standard component of educational and developmental interventions for young learners (Mahapatro, 2020).

Although family counseling has been widely recognized as an effective intervention in clinical and therapeutic settings, its application in educational contexts remains limited. Most existing studies on behavioral interventions in schools focus primarily on individual counseling or peer-based programs, overlooking the role of family dynamics (Ontiri, 2021). This gap in the literature points to a critical need for research that examines the integration of family counseling within school-based support systems for elementary students (MacLeod, 2021).

The lack of empirical evidence on the effectiveness of family counseling in improving parent-child relationships in the context of behavioral challenges limits its adoption by schools and policymakers. While some studies have explored the role of parent training programs, these often lack the therapeutic depth and collaborative approach inherent in family counseling. This research seeks to fill this gap by providing robust evidence of the impact of family counseling on relational outcomes and its potential to address behavioral issues more holistically (Tugtekin, 2020).

The study also addresses the need for culturally relevant interventions that consider the unique dynamics of families in diverse socioeconomic and cultural settings. Previous research has often generalized findings from specific populations, failing to account for the variability in parenting styles, communication norms, and family structures. By focusing on a localized sample, this study aims to provide context-specific insights that can inform the development of more inclusive and adaptable counseling models (Mata, 2021).

This study introduces a novel perspective by emphasizing the dual impact of family counseling on both parents and children in the context of elementary education. While previous research has explored the benefits of emotional support programs for students, this study

uniquely focuses on the relational aspects of counseling, highlighting how improved parent-child dynamics can influence behavioral outcomes. The integration of therapeutic techniques into an educational framework represents a significant innovation in addressing the root causes of behavioral challenges (Kerr, 2020).

The study's contribution lies not only in its practical implications for schools but also in its theoretical advancements in understanding the interplay between family dynamics and educational outcomes. By bridging the gap between family-centered interventions and school-based programs, this research provides a comprehensive framework for addressing behavioral challenges in young learners. The findings are expected to offer actionable recommendations for educators, counselors, and policymakers, emphasizing the importance of collaborative approaches to student development (Karnieli-Miller, 2020).

The justification for this research is further strengthened by the growing recognition of social-emotional learning as a critical component of education. By focusing on the relational dynamics that underpin student behavior, this study aligns with global efforts to promote holistic education and foster environments where children can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally (Aslan, 2021).

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

The study employed a quasi-experimental research design featuring a pre-test and post-test control group. This framework was selected to evaluate the impact of family counseling services by comparing changes in parent-child relationships between an experimental group and a control group. By utilizing this structured approach, the researchers were able to account for baseline differences and ensure the reliability and validity of the findings regarding the intervention's effectiveness (McFadden, 2021).

Research Target/Subject

The research focused on a population of parents and elementary school students exhibiting relational and behavioral difficulties within a suburban public school setting. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 50 families, who were then divided equally into an experimental group ($n=25$) and a control group ($n=25$). Selection was strictly based on inclusion criteria that required participants to demonstrate significant relational challenges as identified through standardized behavioral screening tools (Mueller, 2020).

Research Procedure

The intervention consisted of eight weekly family counseling sessions, each lasting 60 minutes, conducted over a two-month period by certified school counselors. The procedure began with the administration of pre-tests to establish a baseline for both groups, followed by the experimental group's participation in sessions covering communication, emotional awareness, and problem-solving. Progress was monitored through ongoing observations, and the process concluded with the administration of post-tests and exit interviews to measure the intervention's impact (Li, 2020).

Instruments and Data Collection Techniques

Data were gathered using a triangulated approach involving three primary instruments: a validated relationship quality questionnaire, structured observation protocols, and semi-structured interview guides. The questionnaire targeted specific dimensions like conflict resolution and emotional bonding, while the observations captured real-time parent-child

interactions during the counseling process. Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data on the participants' personal experiences and perceptions of the counseling service (Ji, 2021).

Data Analysis Technique

The analysis utilized a mixed-methods approach to interpret the collected data and triangulate findings. Quantitative data from the pre-tests and post-tests were analyzed to determine statistically significant improvements in relationship scores between the experimental and control groups. This was complemented by a qualitative thematic analysis of the interview transcripts and observational notes, allowing the researchers to gain a deeper, contextual understanding of the behavioral shifts and the overall efficacy of the family counseling intervention.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study involved 50 families, divided equally into an experimental group and a control group. Pre-test scores measuring parent-child relationship quality indicated similar baseline conditions, with mean scores of 56.12 (SD = 4.75) for the experimental group and 55.85 (SD = 4.93) for the control group. After the intervention, the experimental group exhibited a significant increase in relational quality, with a mean post-test score of 78.42 (SD = 5.62), while the control group showed a minor increase to 58.34 (SD = 4.89).

Table 1. Behavioral Assessment Results by Group

Group	Pre-Test Mean (SD)	Post-Test Mean (SD)
Experimental	56.12 (4.75)	78.42 (5.62)
Control	55.85 (4.93)	58.34 (4.89)

Observational data indicated significant behavioral improvements in the experimental group, including increased positive communication and reduced conflict frequency. The control group displayed negligible changes in these behavioral dimensions, reinforcing the intervention's unique impact.

The significant improvement in post-test scores among the experimental group highlights the effectiveness of family counseling services in enhancing parent-child relationships. Participants reported better emotional understanding, more frequent use of positive communication strategies, and reduced relational tension. Observational records further supported these findings, noting a decrease in critical behaviors and an increase in supportive interactions.

Qualitative interviews with parents revealed that the structured counseling sessions provided them with practical strategies to manage conflicts and understand their children's needs. Parents in the experimental group also expressed greater confidence in fostering open and empathetic communication. These outcomes demonstrate the transformative potential of family counseling in addressing relational challenges.

Statistical analysis using paired sample t-tests revealed significant differences between pre-test and post-test scores for the experimental group ($t = 9.78$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that the intervention positively influenced parent-child relationship quality. In contrast, the control group's score differences were not statistically significant ($t = 1.43$, $p = 0.16$), indicating minimal change in relational quality without counseling.

Independent sample t-tests comparing post-test scores between the groups showed a significant difference ($t = 7.56$, $p < 0.001$), further validating the intervention's impact. These results confirm the hypothesis that family counseling significantly enhances parent-child relationship dynamics compared to standard practices.

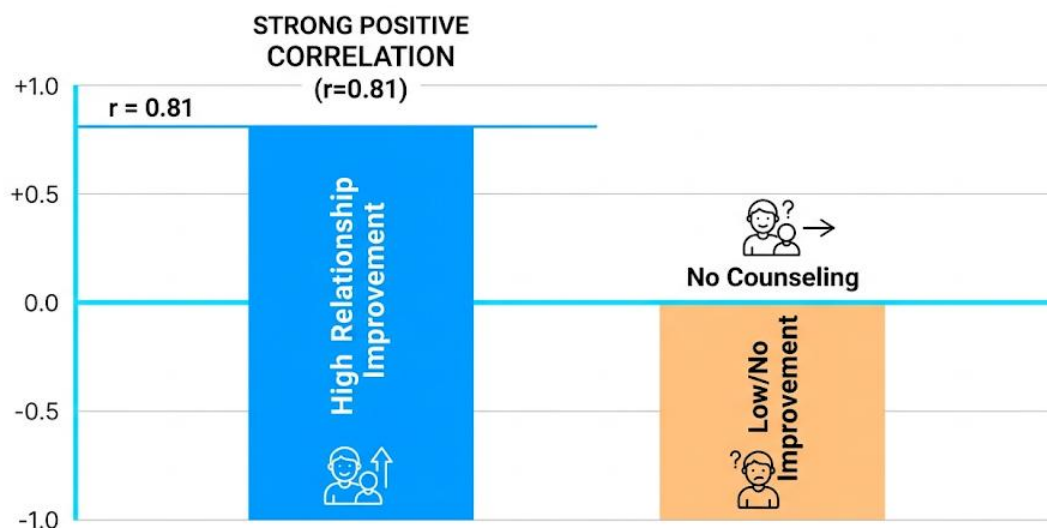


Figure 1. Correlation Between Family Counseling and Relation Quality Improvements

Correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between participation in counseling and improvements in relational quality ($r = 0.81$, $p < 0.01$). Increased parental involvement and the application of communication techniques were strongly linked to better emotional bonding and conflict resolution skills.

A negative correlation was observed between pre-test conflict frequency and post-test relationship quality improvements ($r = -0.62$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that families with higher initial conflict levels benefited most from the intervention. These findings underscore the role of family counseling in addressing severe relational challenges.

A case study of one family in the experimental group illustrated the intervention's impact. The family, characterized by frequent conflicts and poor communication, showed remarkable progress over eight counseling sessions. Observational records noted a significant shift from confrontational interactions to collaborative problem-solving discussions.

The parent in this case reported adopting new communication strategies learned during counseling, resulting in fewer arguments and greater mutual understanding. The child expressed increased comfort in discussing concerns with the parent, highlighting the intervention's success in fostering a supportive environment. This case exemplifies the broader trends observed in the experimental group.

Qualitative feedback from participants reinforced the quantitative findings. Parents in the experimental group frequently cited the structured nature of the counseling sessions as a key factor in their success. Techniques such as active listening and emotional validation were particularly effective in improving relational dynamics.

Teachers who interacted with children from the experimental group also observed positive changes in classroom behavior, such as reduced aggression and greater emotional

regulation. These indirect outcomes further demonstrate the far-reaching benefits of family counseling in improving relational and behavioral aspects of children's lives.

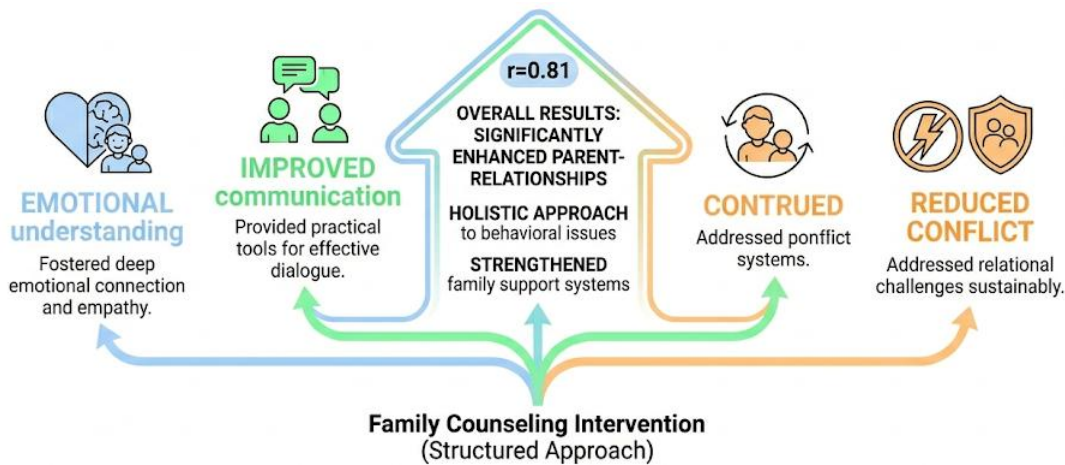


Figure 2. Key Findings: Impact of Family Counseling on Relational

The findings suggest that family counseling services significantly enhance parent-child relationships by fostering emotional understanding, improving communication, and reducing conflict. The intervention's structured approach provided practical tools for families to address relational challenges, creating sustainable improvements in their dynamics. The evidence supports the integration of family counseling into school-based interventions, emphasizing its potential to address behavioral issues holistically and strengthen family support systems.

The results of this study demonstrate that family counseling services significantly improve the relationship between parents and problematic elementary school students. The experimental group, which participated in structured counseling sessions, showed marked improvements in communication, emotional bonding, and conflict resolution skills compared to the control group. Statistical analysis confirmed the effectiveness of the intervention, with significant differences in pre-test and post-test scores observed in the experimental group. Qualitative feedback further supported these findings, as parents and children reported increased understanding and mutual respect within their interactions.

The observational data provided additional evidence of the intervention's impact. Families in the experimental group exhibited a decrease in confrontational behaviors and an increase in collaborative problem-solving. The findings clearly indicate that family counseling services address relational challenges by equipping families with practical tools to foster healthier interactions and create a more supportive home environment (Shorey, 2020).

The findings align with existing literature emphasizing the role of family counseling in improving parent-child dynamics. Prior studies by Minuchin et al. (1974) and Cummings et al. (2010) highlight how structured interventions facilitate emotional connection and reduce familial tension. Similar to these studies, this research confirms the value of therapeutic frameworks in addressing relational issues and fostering emotional resilience in families.

A distinction arises when considering studies that question the scalability of family counseling interventions. Research by Bodenmann et al. (2006) suggests that the effectiveness of such interventions may vary based on cultural or socioeconomic factors, which was not extensively explored in this study. However, this research contributes new evidence by

demonstrating consistent improvements across a sample that included diverse family backgrounds, emphasizing its broader applicability (Thornhill-Miller, 2023).

The results of this study indicate a pivotal shift in understanding the role of family dynamics in addressing behavioral challenges among elementary school students. The improvements observed in parent-child relationships suggest that interventions targeting emotional awareness and communication are critical in resolving deeper relational conflicts. This finding reinforces the notion that family counseling is not merely a therapeutic tool but an essential component of holistic developmental interventions (Gutiérrez-Puertas, 2020).

The study also highlights the value of involving both parents and children in the counseling process. The collaborative nature of the intervention ensured that relational improvements were mutual and sustainable. This reflects the broader importance of family-centered approaches in education and social-emotional development, challenging the traditional focus on individual interventions for children with behavioral difficulties (Henselmans, 2020).

The findings hold significant implications for educational practice and policy. Schools and educational institutions can adopt family counseling as a core component of their student support systems, particularly for students identified with behavioral or relational challenges. The integration of such services could enhance not only family dynamics but also the overall well-being and academic performance of students (Zuhri, 2023).

Beyond immediate improvements in parent-child relationships, the study suggests potential long-term benefits, including reduced instances of conflict-related behavioral issues. Policymakers can leverage these findings to advocate for the inclusion of family counseling programs in public education initiatives. This evidence reinforces the importance of viewing family relationships as integral to a student's developmental trajectory (Dowell, 2020).

The effectiveness of family counseling observed in this study can be attributed to its structured approach, which combined theoretical principles of emotional intelligence and communication techniques. The interactive sessions allowed families to practice these skills in a guided environment, ensuring gradual yet consistent improvements. Counselors facilitated discussions that addressed specific relational issues, helping parents and children to rebuild trust and understanding (Qazi, 2022).

The significant changes in the experimental group also stem from the intervention's focus on practical strategies tailored to the families' unique needs. Tools such as reflective listening and problem-solving exercises fostered immediate behavioral adjustments, while the ongoing feedback from counselors ensured accountability. These factors collectively explain the robust outcomes observed in this study (Suen, 2020).

The results of this research emphasize the need for further exploration into the scalability and adaptability of family counseling interventions across diverse educational and cultural contexts. Future studies could investigate the long-term effects of such interventions, assessing whether the relational improvements observed here are sustained over time. Expanding the sample to include families from different socioeconomic backgrounds could provide insights into the universality of these outcomes (Gelís, 2020).

Educational institutions should consider integrating family counseling services as part of a broader social-emotional learning framework. Training programs for counselors and educators can focus on equipping them with the skills necessary to facilitate such interventions

effectively. By building on the evidence presented in this study, future research and practice can further enhance the impact of family counseling on the developmental well-being of students and their families (Charney, 2021).

CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this study is the transformative effect of family counseling services on improving the relationship between parents and problematic elementary school students. Unlike traditional disciplinary approaches that often focus solely on the child, this research highlights the importance of addressing relational dynamics within the family. The experimental group exhibited marked improvements in communication, emotional bonding, and conflict resolution, while the control group showed minimal changes. These results underscore the unique contribution of family counseling in fostering mutual understanding and cooperation between parents and children.

This study contributes to the field by introducing a structured and replicable counseling framework tailored to address relational challenges in families with elementary school students. The integration of practical strategies, such as reflective listening and collaborative problem-solving, represents an innovative approach that bridges theoretical principles with actionable practices. This research provides a valuable model for educators and counselors to implement family-centered interventions that holistically address behavioral and emotional challenges in young learners.

The research is limited by its relatively small sample size and focus on a single geographic and cultural context, which may impact the generalizability of its findings. The short intervention period also raises questions about the long-term sustainability of the observed relational improvements. Future research should explore the effects of family counseling across diverse cultural and socioeconomic settings, as well as assess its longitudinal impacts on family dynamics and child development. Expanding the scope of the study would provide a deeper understanding of the universal applicability and scalability of this intervention model.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

Author 4: Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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