

Contents lists available at ojs.aeducia.org**International Journal of Counseling and Psychotherapy**

Volume 1, Issue 2 (2024), 10.64420/ijcp.v1i2

Journal homepage: <https://ojs.aeducia.org/index.php/ijcp>**IJCP**E-ISSN [3064-3465](https://doi.org/10.64420/ijcp.v1i2)P-ISSN [3064-271X](https://doi.org/10.64420/ijcp.v1i2)

Review Article

Read Online: <https://doi.org/10.64420/ijcp.v1i2.171>

Open Access

The Role of Family Counseling in Improving Adolescents' Mental Health

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: October 24, 2024
 Revised: November 25, 2024
 Accepted: December 23, 2024
 Published: December 29, 2024

KEYWORDS

Family counseling;
 Adolescents;
 Mental health

ABSTRACT

Background: Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to mental health problems due to rapid biological, psychological, and social changes. Addressing these issues requires effective and systemic interventions, one of which is family counseling. **Objective:** This study aims to review the role and effectiveness of family counseling in improving adolescent mental health. **Method:** A systematic literature review (SLR) method was used to analyze relevant studies and provide a comprehensive understanding applicable to clinical and policy settings. **Results:** The findings reveal that family counseling is effective in treating anxiety, depression (including Major Depressive Disorder), eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa, internet gaming disorder, suicidal ideation, and self-harm behaviors. It also enhances parental support, improves communication and relationships within families, strengthens family functioning, and fosters a healthier home environment. Furthermore, it supports better emotional regulation, adaptability, positive coping strategies, and school adjustment in adolescents. **Conclusion:** Family counseling offers a holistic approach to adolescent mental health. **Contribution:** This study contributes theoretically and practically to the understanding of family-based mental health interventions for youth.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mental health problems have become a global issue. According to the World Health Organization (2022), one in eight people worldwide has mental health problems, with depression being the most common mental health problem. Even though a person's mental health status can always change, several periods are more crucial in a person's life, one of which is adolescence (WHO, 2022). Adolescents naturally experience greater exposure to mental health disorders as adolescents experience exploration and transition from childhood to adulthood (Patton et al., 2016). In Indonesia, as many as 34.9% of adolescents aged 10-17 years show symptoms of mental health problems but never receive adequate treatment (Wahdi et al., 2023).

This situation puts adolescents in a vulnerable position in terms of mental health. Adolescents with mental health problems have a lower academic achievement (Grotan et al., 2019), have a higher risk of dropping out of school (Lawrence & Adebawale, 2023) and have a higher tendency to engage in risky behavior such as drug abuse, alcohol use, and self-harm behavior (Bozzini et al., 2021).

Mental health disorders in adolescents, especially depression and anxiety, are usually treated using cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) techniques as the primary intervention. Although CBT is an intervention that has been proven to be effective, Oud et al. (2019) emphasized that CBT's positive impact gives better results when the family is involved in the counseling process. Rohany et al. (2011) also believe that interventions given to adolescents are

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How to Cite this Article:

Agustine, T., Fauzia, A. N., & Kyaw, A. (2024). The Role of Family Counseling in Improving Adolescents' Mental Health. *International Journal of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, 1(2), 51-61. <https://doi.org/10.64420/ijcp.v1i2.171>



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more effective when family members are involved because the family greatly influences adolescents, especially in Eastern countries.

Previous research has shown that family plays a vital role in adolescent mental health. Family functioning and the form of interaction between family members are some of the factors that determine the level of depression experienced by adolescents (Chen et al., 2023). Furthermore, cohesive families with a high frequency of communication and positive relationships are critical protective factors in adolescent's mental health (Karimli et al., 2024). Emotional support from family members also helps maintain adolescents' mental health (Lau & Kwok, 2000). These findings show that factors in the family are factors that influence adolescents' mental health. Therefore, the family needs to be involved in counseling, changing the intervention approach to family counseling. Family counseling focuses on increasing positive interactions between family members so they can overcome their problems and achieve wellbeing for each family member and the family as a unit (Cottrell, 2002). However, systematic literature reviews that focus on family counseling, especially the application of family counseling to improve adolescent mental health, are difficult to find. Considering that many practitioners often use family counseling as an approach, the research should not be based only on one research. Therefore, it is necessary to explore further the role of family counseling on adolescent mental health through a systematic literature review.

Many existing theories may not have fully considered the role of family in influencing adolescent mental health directly through family counseling. Although theories on adolescent development, family psychology, and family counseling exist, there is still room to develop theories that integrate the dynamic role of the family in counseling interventions focused on adolescent mental health. In addition, one gap is the absence of an integrated family counseling model specifically aimed at improving adolescent mental health. Research could extend the theory by developing or adapting a more specific model that integrates family counseling elements with psychological approaches focused on adolescent mental health issues.

This article aims to fill the absence of a systematic review of the role of family counseling in improving mental health in adolescents. The specific objectives of this study are (i) to review the role of family counseling in overcoming mental health problems experienced by adolescents and (ii) to analyses the effectiveness of family counseling in improving adolescent mental health.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This research design uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. SLR is a comprehensive and structured approach to research that involves identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing all available evidence on a specific topic. When researching the role of family counseling in improving youth's mental health, a systematic literature review is essential because it helps ensure that all relevant studies are included and that the findings are reliable and valid. Using a systematic approach, researchers can reduce bias, increase the transparency of their methods, and more accurately identify gaps in the existing literature. Additionally, a systematic review can provide a more complete understanding of the effectiveness of family counseling in treating youth mental health issues, which can inform clinical practice and policy decisions. SLR helps researcher's organisme, analyses, and synthesize information from relevant literature to provide a comprehensive picture of the role of family counseling in improving adolescent mental health. Overall, a systematic literature review is an essential tool in conducting rigorous and reliable research on the role of family counseling in improving youth's mental health

2.2 Research Object

The literature that is the object of this research is journal articles. Articles are searched using article databases such as PubMed, ScienceDirect, and Wiley Online Library websites. This research includes articles that meet the inclusion criteria, which are then analyzed and evaluated. The data that will be used in SLR research is secondary data, which means the data will be obtained from the research results that other researchers have conducted. Secondary data sources are obtained from reputable journal articles within the defined research scope. The journal articles selected were articles published in the last ten years, namely in the range 2014 to 2023. Articles were searched using the following keywords: (1) family counseling; adolescents' mental health, (2) family therapy; adolescents' mental health, (3) effectiveness of family counseling.

2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria are the specific characteristics or parameters that articles must meet to qualify for a particular research study. The inclusion criteria in this study are explained below:

- (1) Participants: Adolescents (10-17 years) diagnosed with mental health problems/disorders along with their families.

- (2) Intervention: Family counseling or therapy delivered by mental health professionals.
- (3) Comparison: Studies that compare family counseling with a control group, waitlist, or alternative treatment.
- (4) Study design: Randomized controlled trials (RCTs) or quasi-experimental studies with a comparison group.
- (5) Language: Articles published in English.
- (6) Publication time: Articles published in the last ten years (2014 to 2023).
- (7) Article type: Open-access articles in reputable journals.

The exclusion criteria in this study are explained below:

- (1) Participants: Studies that include participants outside the age range of adolescents (10-17 years) or those with specific diagnoses unrelated to mental health (e.g., physical health conditions).
- (2) Intervention: Studies that do not involve family counselling or family therapy as a primary intervention or studies that involve family counseling as a secondary or adjunct intervention.
- (3) Comparison: Studies that do not have a comparison group or a comparison group that is irrelevant to the research question (e.g. A comparison group receiving individual counseling).
- (4) Study design: Studies that are not randomized controlled trials or quasi-experimental studies with a comparison group.
- (5) Language: Articles that are not published in English.
- (6) Publication time: Articles that were published before 2014.

Article type: Articles published in subscription-based journals or open-access articles from non-reputable journals.

2.4 Data Extraction

The data extraction process is conducted by checking each journal article that meets the inclusion criteria and filling in the data extraction form in table form. The table structure consists of citations and year of publication, journal article title, research result, and journal quality. The data from the table will then be examined for similarities and differences and then discussed to create a conclusion.

2.5 SLR Research Stages

The implementation of SLR research consists of the five stages below:

- (1) Stage 1: Defining research questions. At this stage, researchers determine clear and focused research questions regarding the role of family counseling in improving adolescent mental health.
- (2) Stage 2: Search for literature. At this stage, researchers looked for articles relevant to the research theme using keywords such as family counseling, mental health, and adolescents.
- (3) Stage 3: Selecting literature. The literature that has been obtained is selected based on inclusion and exclusion criteria.
- (4) Stage 4: Analyzing articles that pass the literature selection. At this stage, the researcher analyses the data to identify the main findings from the literature. Data analysis includes comparing study results, identifying trends, and implications for the role of family counselling in improving adolescent mental health.
- (5) Stage 5: Concluding. At this stage, the researcher makes research conclusions based on the findings. Conclusions were drawn based on the research questions asked.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

3.1.1. Literature Review Selection Results

There were 14,642 studies identified through various article databases such as PubMed, ScienceDirect, and Wiley Online Library using family counseling and adolescents as keywords. These studies are screened; from the results of this screening, 6,290 studies (43%) were published more than ten years ago and excluded from the study. Of the remaining 8,352 studies, 7,232 (49%) were excluded due to limited access to the full article. The remaining 1,120 studies were checked for titles, and 963 (7%) were excluded because they did not match the research aims. At the final screening stage, 143 studies were excluded because the study variables were unrelated to mental health or the study used qualitative or literature review methods. In total, 14 studies that met the inclusion criteria are included in this systematic literature review.

The results of the selection of journal articles that are relevant to the research topic are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Literature Review Selection Results

Authors	Title of Article	Journal	Years	Conclusion
Jiménez et al.	Effectiveness of StructuralStrategic Family Therapy in the treatment	International Journal of Environmental Re-	2019	Structural-Strategic Family Therapy is effective in reducing problem behavior and drug abuse in adolescents. Adolescents show increased positive

Authors	Title of Article	Journal	Years	Conclusion
	of adolescents with mental health problems and their families	search and Public Health, 16(7)		behavior as a direct impact of Structural-Strategic Family Therapy. Changes in behavior are also an indirect impact felt by adolescents from increased family functioning after parents participate in SSFT. SSFT plays a role in improving relationships at the family, dyadic and individual levels.
Eisler et al.	A pragmatic randomized multi-center trial of multifamily and single-family therapy for adolescent anorexia nervosa	BMC Psychiatry, 16(1)	2016	Adolescents who received a combination of multifamily therapy and single-family therapy treatment showed an increase in body weight, accompanied by an increase in positive mood. At the end of the treatment, multifamily therapy has shown its effectiveness and statistically significant differences in outcomes compared to other forms of treatment. Family therapy brings together groups of families and maximizes family support, thereby improving treatment results.
Waraan et al.	Efficacy of attachment-based family therapy compared to treatment as usual for suicidal ideation in adolescents with MDD	Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 26(2)	2021	Attachment-Based Family Therapy and TAU can both reduce suicidal ideation in adolescents, but there is no significant difference between ABFT and TAU treatment in reducing suicidal ideation in adolescents.
Wijana et al.	Preliminary evaluation of an intensive integrated individual and family therapy model for self-harming adolescents	BMC Psychiatry, 18(1)	2018	Family therapy performed together with intensive individual counseling succeeded in significantly reducing the frequency of self-harm behaviour and suicide attempts.
Le Grange et al.	Enhanced cognitive-behavior therapy and family-based treatment for adolescents with an eating disorder: a non-randomized effectiveness trial	Psychological Medicine, 52(13)	2022	Family-based treatment and CBT-Enhanced have similar results in treating adolescents with eating disorders when followed up after treatment.
Jørring & Gjessing Jensen	Treatment efficacy of narrative family therapy for children and adolescents with diverse psychiatric symptomatology	Scandinavian Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Psychology, 6(2)	2018	Narrative Family Therapy is efficacious in improving adolescents' self-concept and reducing depression indexes in adolescents.
Herres et al.	Combining attachment-based family therapy and cognitive behavioral therapy to improve outcomes for adolescents with anxiety	Frontiers in Psychiatry, 14	2023	Adolescents showed a decrease in anxiety when given ABFT intervention together with CBT. ABFT plays a role in improving the relationship between adolescents and parents, which also influences the level of their anxiety.
Nielsen et al.	Multidimensional family therapy reduces problematic gaming in adolescents: A randomised controlled trial	Journal of Behavioral Addictions, 10(2)	2021	Multidimensional family therapy is more effective in reducing internet gaming disorder in adolescents than family treatment as usual. In this research, MDFT plays a role in improving relationships and communication patterns between family members. MDFT strengthens competent parental educational practices for parents and helps adolescents build more adaptive and prosocial coping skills.
Lu et al.	Influence of in-person and remote Satir family	Heliyon, 9(5)	2023	Remote Satir Family Therapy is effective in reducing levels of anxiety and depression in

Authors	Title of Article	Journal	Years	Conclusion
	therapy on emotions and behavior of adolescents with major depressive disorder			adolescents who suffer from major depressive disorder. RSFT is also effective in reducing the frequency of self-harming behaviour in participants. RSFT plays an essential role in changing the stigma regarding MDD in adolescents and parents, improving communication between adolescents and parents so they have fewer conflicts compared to pre-treatment. RFST also helps adolescents develop positive coping mechanisms when faced with life events.
Dennhag et al.	Parental caregiver burden and recovery of adolescent anorexia nervosa after multifamily therapy	Eating Disorders, 29(5)	2021	Multifamily therapy is effective as an additional therapy to improve eating habits and thinking patterns in adolescents suffering from anorexia nervosa. Apart from that, MFT also plays a role in alleviating feelings of burden on parents. Feelings of guilt in the mother and feelings of perceived burden in the father were reported to improve after receiving treatment.
Rognli et al.	Moderation of treatment effects by parent-adolescent conflict in a randomised controlled trial of Attachment-Based Family Therapy for adolescent depression	Scandinavian Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Psychology, 8(1)	2020	Attachment-Based Family Therapy is a promising therapy for adolescents suffering from depression. ABFT plays a role in reducing conflict between mother and adolescent. The reduced conflict between adolescents and parents then results in increased parental support for adolescents who are experiencing depression so that, eventually, the level of depression in adolescents declines.
Li et al.	Systemic family therapy of comorbidity of anxiety and depression with epilepsy in adolescents	Psychiatry Investigation, 13(3)	2016	The treatment group showed significantly lower anxiety and depression scores compared to the control group. Systematic Family Therapy plays a role in improving family function, family environments, and social support between family members so that adolescents as patients feel more appreciated and supported.
Hülquist et al.	Resource-strengthening training for parents of adolescents with problematic gaming (Res@t-P): A clinical pilot study	International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 19(15)	2022	Multidimensional Family Therapy (MDFT) was found to reduce problematic gaming in adolescents in a randomised controlled trial. The study used various questionnaires to measure parental self-efficacy, family communication, and perceived stress. The study suggests that MDFT should be complemented by individual psychotherapy, parental counseling, and individual family sessions.
Russon et al.	Attachment-based family therapy versus nondirective supportive therapy for les-bian, gay, bisexual and questioning adolescents with depression, and suicidal ideation: An exploratory study	Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior.	2023	LGBQ adolescents in the ABFT condition showed a greater rate of reduction in depressive symptoms over treatment. There were significant decreases in both depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation over time for all participants. Adolescents who reported high levels of parental support and good communication reported fewer mental health symptoms.

3.1.2. The Effectiveness and Role of Family Counseling in Improving Adolescent Mental Health

The results of the selected literature review were then analyzed. Due to the limited number of studies, data

analysis was conducted by summarizing and tabulating the data and presenting it according to the research questions. Summary data regarding the effectiveness of family counseling and the role of family counseling in improving adolescent mental health is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Research Outcomes and the Role of Each Family Counseling

Family Counseling Approaches	Mental Health Issues	Research Outcomes	Role of Family Counseling
Structural-Strategic Family Therapy Multifamily Therapy	Anxiety	Lower anxiety level (+)	Strengthen family as a system Improve family cohesion
	Anorexia nervosa	Improvement in mood (+) Increase in body weight (+) Improvement in positive eating habits (+) Reduce depression (+)	Maximize family support Highlight the potential of the group of families as a powerful treatment resource Alleviate guilt and burden feelings from parents
Attachment-based Family Therapy	Suicidal ideation	Reduce suicidal ideation (+) Reduce depressive symptoms (+)	Increase parental support Improve communication
	Anxiety	Reduce level of anxiety (+)	Improve the relationship between family members
	Depression	Reduce the level of depression (+)	Increase parental support for children suffering from depression
Integrated Family Therapy	Self-harming	Reduce the frequency of self-harm behaviour (+) Reduce suicide attempts (+)	Improve school adjustment and attendance for adolescent Give parents chances to express their frustration Lower anxiety and depression in parents (because of self-harming behaviour done by adolescents) Enhance emotional regulation in adolescents Re-establish functional family pattern
			Increase understanding from parents about their children's problem
Narrative Family Therapy	Depression	Improve self-concept (+) Reduce depression (+)	Improve the relationship between family members
Multidimensional Family Therapy	Internet gaming disorder	Reduce internet gaming disorder (+) Reduce problematic gaming behaviour (+)	Improve communication pattern Strengthen parental educational practices Improve adaptability in adolescents Improve prosocial coping skills in adolescents
			Change the stigma of disorder in parents
Satir Family Therapy	Major depressive disorder	Reduce level of anxiety (+) Reduce level of depression (+) Reduce frequency of self-harm behaviour (+)	Improve communication between family members Develop a positive coping mechanism
Systemic Family Therapy	Anxiety, depression	Lower anxiety scores (+) Lower depression scores (+)	Improve family function Create better family environments Improve social support between family members Adolescents feel appreciated and supported

Based on the analysis, it is found that family counseling is efficacious in improving adolescent mental health on various issues studied, namely: (1) anxiety, (2) depres-

sion (including MDD), (3) eating disorder (anorexia nervosa), (4) internet gaming disorder, (5) suicidal ideation, and (6) self-harming behavior. However, the effectiveness

of those studies varies for each mental health issue. Furthermore, it is known as well that family counseling has a role in (1) increasing parental support, (2) improving the relationship between family members, (3) improving communication between family members, (4) improving family function, (5) creating better family environments, (6) enhancing emotional regulation in adolescents, (7) improving adaptability in adolescents, (8) developing a positive coping mechanism in adolescents, and (9) improving school adjustment and attendance for adolescents.

3.2. Discussion

This literature review examines the role and effectiveness of family counseling for adolescents with mental health issues. The interventions carried out varied in terms of content and objectives. Some interventions provide particular training for parents to increase their competence in parenting (Nielsen et al., 2021; Hülquist et al., 2022), while other interventions combine family counselling as the primary treatment with individual counselling and psychoeducation as complementary intervention (Herres et al., 2023; Wijana et al., 2018). The family counselling in this study used several approaches, namely structural-strategic family therapy, multi-family therapy, attachmentbased family therapy, integrated family therapy, narrative family therapy, multidimensional family therapy, satirical family therapy, and systemic family therapy. From this study, it can be seen that specific approaches in family counseling tend to be used for specific mental health issues, for example, multifamily therapy, which is usually used to treat adolescents who experience anorexia nervosa (Cook-Darzens & Duclos, 2023; Denhag et al., 2021; Eisler et al., 2016; Tantillo et al., 2019), and multidimensional family therapy which is commonly used to treat adolescents who suffer from internet gaming disorder (Bonnaire et al., 2019; Hülquist et al., 2022; Nielsen et al., 2021).

In adolescents suffering from anorexia nervosa, the approach usually used is multifamily therapy. Multifamily therapy brings together several families experiencing the same problems so that families can learn from each other, share experiences and support each other (Funderud et al., 2023). Multifamily therapy is also helpful in alleviating the feelings of guilt experienced by parents because, through multifamily therapy, parents can get support from other parents who also have adolescents with anorexia nervosa (Denhag et al., 2021). Adolescent's suffering from anorexia nervosa have difficulty in choosing food and building healthy eating habits. Therefore, the role of parents is needed in helping adolescents choose what food to eat and how much food to consume to return the adolescent's weight (Rienecke, 2017). Parents' emotional support also plays a vital role in adolescents' recovery (Chang et al.,

2023). Therefore, adolescents must receive intervention involving parents and other family members.

For adolescents who suffer from anxiety and depression, the family counseling approaches used tend to vary, such as structural-strategic family therapy, attachment based family therapy, and systemic family therapy. These approaches are effective in reducing the levels of anxiety and depression experienced by adolescents (Herres et al., 2023; Jiménez et al., 2019; Li et al., 2016). Even though family counseling has valid effectiveness, it is best to add the interventions with psychoeducation to family members. Psychoeducation aims to provide information to adolescents and their families about the disorders they are experiencing and how to treat them (Bäumel et al., 2006). Through psychoeducation, family members better understand the anxiety and depression disorders experienced by adolescents and increase the ability of family members to care for adolescents (Rasmawati et al., 2020). Psychoeducation has been proven to be effective in not only reducing anxiety in adolescents but also preventing anxiety from occurring (Havinga et al., 2021).

Based on a systematic literature review conducted, the role of family counseling in dealing with adolescents with mental health problems is primarily to improve relationships between family members by mending communication patterns between family members. The majority of interventions carried out by the studies reviewed involve providing education to family members about mental health issues experienced by adolescents so that other family members can understand what is happening to adolescents and provide support, which ultimately improves adolescent mental health (Eisler et al., 2016).

With the findings from this research, the government needs to ensure that family counseling services become an integrated part of guidance and counseling services in schools and normalise the involvement of parents or other family members in the various developments experienced by adolescents. Family counseling in Indonesia is mostly still labelled as a counseling approach used specifically to resolve household problems, such as maintaining household harmony (Putri et al., 2022; Rahayu, 2017; Yanti, 2020), preventing divorce (Fitria et al., 2021; Purnamasari, 2019), preventing domestic violence (Marini & Nefi Darmayanti, 2023; Suteja et al., 2020), and other household problems. In contrast, research in other countries has proved that family counseling can effectively intervene in other fields, such as adolescent mental health.

4. IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Based on research findings, the implications and contributions of this research are:

- (1) The results of this research can be used as a reference for school counsellors in understanding the role of

family counseling in improving adolescent mental health, especially for school counsellors in Indonesia, where family counseling is still not very popular.

- (2) The results of this research are helpful as a reference regarding the theory and practice of family counselling, especially those related to handling mental health issues in adolescents. This research is valuable in adding references to family counseling in Indonesia, where family counseling research topics are still limited to household problems.
- (3) The research results and limitations of this research can be used to develop better research in the future.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Several limitations occurred during the research process on the role of family counseling in improving adolescents' mental health. The first limitation is that the literature review may focus more on family counseling experiences in particular cultural contexts, in this study, western culture. Hence, the generalization of results to various cultural groups is limited. The second limitation is that this study only includes articles published in English, so it may ignore essential research results from literature in other languages that can provide unique views regarding the role of family counseling. The third limitation is the limitation of analysis, which is only conducted on studies with quantitative data, so it is possible to overlook essential findings from qualitative research.

Research Recommendations. Further research is needed to identify family counseling approaches that are most effective in supporting adolescent mental health. This includes using techniques such as family systemic therapy, solution-focused therapy, or trauma-informed approaches. It is also important to understand how cultural values influence the effectiveness of family counseling so that approaches can be tailored to the unique needs of each community.

6. CONCLUSION

Research suggests that family counseling can be a significantly effective treatment approach for improving the mental health of adolescents, especially mental health issues regarding anxiety, depression, eating disorder, internet gaming disorder, suicidal ideation and self-harming behavior. By targeting family relationships, family counselling can enhance communication, resolve conflicts, and foster stronger connections between family members, leading to better mental health outcomes for young people.

The implications of this research are significant for counsellors, especially school counsellors, highlighting the importance of involving families in the intervention process. By including family counseling in the treatment plans,

counsellors can offer more comprehensive and holistic treatment to their counselees, handling both individual and family factors that contribute to mental health issues.

To sum up, this research highlights the value of family counseling in improving mental health issues among adolescents. By acknowledging the interconnectedness of family factors and individual mental health, counsellors can provide more effective treatment that targets the underlying causes of mental health issues, leading to better outcomes not only for adolescents but for parents as well.

Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge the contributions of everyone who made this research possible. We also appreciate the feedback and guidance from our colleagues, who provided valuable insights and suggestions throughout the research process. Finally, we acknowledge the tireless efforts of the editorial team and reviewers who helped improve the quality of this article. Without the support of all these individuals, this research would not have been possible.

CRedit Authorship Contribution Statement

Each author contributed to the manuscript according to their specific expertise. Author 1 (TA), Author 2 (ANF), and Author 3 (AK) conducted the literature searches, screened articles for inclusion, and extracted data from the included studies. TA analysed the data, synthesised the findings, and drafted the manuscript. ANF and AK provided critical feedback on the manuscript and revisions. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declared that they have no competing interests with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication that might have influenced the performance or presentation of the work described in this article.

Ethical Approval Statement

The author declares that this study is a literature review and does not involve human participants, personal data, or any other subjects. Therefore, this study does not require ethical approval from a research ethics committee. The entire research process was conducted in accordance with academic ethical standards, upholding scientific honesty, integrity, and the ethical use of legitimate sources.

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<https://doi.org/10.24014/0.8710152>

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First Publication Right:

International Journal of Counseling and Psychotherapy

Article info:

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.64420/ijcp.v1i2.171>

Word Count: 6223

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