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Family Crises: Psychological Dynamics and Strategies for Resolution

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ABSTRACT

Family crises can disrupt emotional stability, interpersonal relationships, and the functional organization of family life. This study examines psychological factors that contribute to overcoming family crises, with particular attention to marital satisfaction, mutual understanding, emotional connection, mutual respect, and role distribution among spouses. A mixed-methods approach was applied through semi-structured conversations, marital satisfaction assessment, evaluation of mutual understanding and respect, and analysis of family role distribution. The findings indicate that couples in the early years of marriage reported higher marital satisfaction and stronger relational indicators than couples married for four to seven years. The decline in satisfaction, understanding, and respect during this period suggests that the third to seventh years of marriage may represent a crisis-prone stage requiring psychological support and adaptive coping strategies. The study highlights the importance of emotional regulation, open communication, mutual respect, and balanced family roles in strengthening family resilience. These findings may inform family counseling, marital education, and preventive interventions aimed at supporting couples during critical periods of family development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Family crises are an inevitable aspect of life, often triggered by diverse stressors such as financial difficulties, health issues, interpersonal conflicts, or significant life transitions. These crises frequently disrupt the stability and functioning of the family unit, generating emotional, psychological, and relational challenges for all members involved. Consequently, the strategies families employ to navigate and overcome these adversities play a pivotal role in determining their long-term resilience and overall well-being.

Effective crisis resolution requires a combination of individual coping mechanisms and collective strategies that support adaptation and recovery. Psychological factors such as emotional regulation, open communication, mutual respect, and equitable role distribution within the family may significantly influence the trajectory and outcomes of family crises. In addition, mutual understanding and supportive relationships are important for resolving conflicts and restoring family harmony. Previous studies have examined family crisis in relation to family adaptation, crisis intervention, psychosomatic illness, and resilience (McCubbin et al., 1983; Cermak, 1973; Al et al., 2011; Walsh, 1996). Other studies have emphasized the role of family support in child development, disability, education, and family harmony (Abidin et al., 2021; Afifah, 2021; Maryanti and Asjjari, 2022; Rizqita et al., 2024). A summary of related studies is presented in **Table 1**.

Building upon this existing body of literature, the present study aims to examine the specific psychological features that contribute to overcoming family crises, focusing on identifying the key mechanisms that facilitate resilience and relational growth. By employing a diverse array of research methods (including assessments of marital satisfaction, mutual understanding, and family role distribution), this research seeks to provide a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of how families can effectively manage critical challenges. Ultimately, these findings are intended to inform practical strategies and targeted interventions aimed at strengthening family systems during times of profound stress and adversity. Although previous studies have discussed family crisis, family adaptation, and family resilience, limited attention has been given to the psychological indicators of marital relations during crisis-prone periods of family life. Therefore, this study aims to examine the role of marital satisfaction, mutual understanding, emotional connection, mutual respect, and family role distribution in overcoming family crises.

2. METHODS

This study used a mixed-methods design to examine psychological factors related to family crises. To clarify the methodological structure of the study, the research design, data sources, main indicators, and purposes of each component are summarized in **Table 2**. The qualitative component was conducted through semi-structured conversations with married individuals to explore their experiences, perceptions, communication patterns, and coping strategies during family difficulties. The quantitative component was conducted through assessments of marital satisfaction, mutual understanding, emotional connection, mutual respect, and family role distribution. The participants consisted of married men and women grouped according to the duration of marriage: couples who had lived together for up to three years and couples who had lived together for four to seven years. This grouping was used because the early years of marriage are often considered an important period of adaptation, while the fourth to seventh years may involve increased family responsibilities, parenting demands, and adjustment to independent family life.

Table 1. Previous research.

NO	RESEARCH FOCUS	KEY CONTRIBUTION	REF.
1	Family adaptation after crisis	Explains how families adapt after a crisis and provides a foundation for understanding resilience.	McCubbin et al. (1983)
2	Crisis after the diagnosis of a child with disability	Shows how specific family stressors may trigger psychological and relational crises.	Fortier and Wanlass (1984)
3	Family crisis and psychosomatic illness	Connects family crisis with physical and psychological symptoms.	Cermak (1973)
4	Family crisis intervention	Discusses whether crisis experience and crisis change influence intervention outcomes.	Al et al. (2011)
5	Grandparents and family crisis	Highlights the role of extended family members during a crisis.	Cherlin and Furstenberg (1986)
6	Family resilience	Provides a conceptual basis for viewing crisis as both risk and opportunity.	Walsh (1996)
7	Family-based early intervention	Shows the importance of family resources in supporting children with special needs.	Abidin et al. (2021)
8	Pandemic and family harmony	Examines how external stressors influence family harmony.	Afifah (2021)
9	Family as an educational environment	Emphasizes the family's role in supporting children's learning and development.	Maryanti and Asjjari (2022)
10	Family-resourced intervention for MDVI children	Demonstrates the role of structured family support in developmental intervention.	Rizqita et al. (2024)
11	Family-based articulation intervention	Shows how family involvement can support children with articulation barriers.	Bela et al. (2024)
12	Family entrepreneurship	Provides a socio-economic perspective on family functioning.	Shaturaev (2022)
13	Family enterprise productivity	Relates family economic activity to production and profitability.	Shaturaev (2023)
14	Gender issues in the family	Highlights gender-related dynamics within family life.	Boriongan and Abdulmalic (2023)
15	Family support during pandemic learning	Shows the importance of family support in educational resilience.	Fitri et al. (2022)
16	Socio-spiritual family environment	Connects affiliation motives with the health of the family environment.	Khushvaktovna and Fayzievna (2023)

Data were collected using four techniques. First, semi-structured conversations were used to identify participants' experiences of family crisis, sources of conflict, and coping mechanisms. Second, a marital satisfaction assessment was used to measure the perceived quality of the marital relationship. Third, structured indicators were used to evaluate mutual understanding, emotional connection, and mutual respect between spouses. Fourth, family role distribution analysis was used to examine how household responsibilities and family roles were shared between husband and wife.

The collected data were analyzed descriptively. Quantitative scores were compared between the two marriage-duration groups and between men and women. Qualitative responses from conversations were used to support the interpretation of the numerical findings, particularly in explaining changes in marital satisfaction, mutual respect, and role distribution during crisis-prone periods.

Table 2. Research design and data sources

COMPONENT	DATA SOURCE / INSTRUMENT	MAIN INDICATORS	PURPOSE
Qualitative exploration	Semi-structured conversations	Perceptions of crisis, conflict sources, coping strategies, and communication patterns	To understand family members' experiences during a crisis
Marital satisfaction assessment	Degree of Satisfaction with Marriage Assessment	Level of marital satisfaction among spouses	To measure the quality of marital relationships
Relational assessment	Structured evaluation of mutual understanding, emotional connection, and mutual respect	Mutual understanding, emotional aspiration, mutual respect	To identify psychological strengths and weaknesses in marital relations
Role distribution analysis	Family Role Distribution Method	Division of household and family responsibilities	To examine functional balance or imbalance in family roles
Descriptive comparison	Group comparison by marriage duration and gender	Differences between up to 3 years and 4-7 years of marriage	To identify crisis-prone patterns in marital development

The following methods were strategically selected to capture both the individual and collective dynamics operating within family systems:

- (i) **Conversation Method:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with family members to explore their perceptions, experiences, and specific coping mechanisms during periods of crisis. This qualitative approach yielded valuable insights into the emotional dynamics, communication patterns, and interpersonal relationships embedded within the family unit.
- (ii) **Degree of Satisfaction with Marriage Assessment:** A standardized assessment tool was utilized to quantitatively measure the level of satisfaction within marital relationships. This evaluation helped determine the quality of the marital bond and its direct role in the family's overall ability to manage crises effectively.
- (iii) **Evaluation of Mutual Understanding, Emotional Connection, and Mutual Respect:** Specific tools and structured questionnaires were administered to deeply assess the extent of mutual understanding, emotional aspirations, and respect shared among family members. These targeted measures provided a comprehensive overview of relational strengths and potential areas for improvement within the family structure.
- (iv) **Role Distribution Analysis:** The "Family Role Distribution" method was applied to meticulously identify and analyze the allocation of roles and responsibilities within the household. This analytical approach sheds light on both the functional and dysfunctional aspects of role distribution, which can significantly influence the family's strategic crisis management.

By integrating these diverse methodologies, the study successfully captures a multidimensional perspective on the psychological factors necessary for overcoming family crises. Consequently, this combination of tools provides a robust and reliable framework for understanding and effectively addressing complex family challenges.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interaction between spouses plays a foundational role in the development of marital and family relations. The positivity of these relations, mutual understanding, emotional connection, mutual respect, and marital satisfaction are essential psychological factors that ensure the strength of a family. Previous studies on family adaptation and resilience also emphasize that family functioning is strongly influenced by relational quality, coping capacity, and the ability of family members to adapt to crises (McCubbin et al., 1983; Walsh, 1996). Consequently, in addressing marital and family issues globally, special attention is consistently given to the state of spousal relations, which serve as the core link in the family system. The proper organization of the relationship between spouses directly underpins healthy interpersonal dynamics among other family members, fostering a positive psychological climate. Conversely, the deterioration of the spousal relationship often leads to a decline in the overall interpersonal relations within the family.

Since the mid-19th century, family issues have been formally recognized as a subject of specialized scientific research. These studies emphasize that internal psychological strengths (particularly the stability of the marriage and marital satisfaction) are decisive factors in evaluating family relations. In this context, family crisis can be understood not only as a period of disruption but also as a process of adaptation that may lead either to deterioration or to constructive change (McCubbin et al., 1983; Al et al., 2011). During a family crisis, two potential trajectories can develop regarding the family's future:

- (i) Destructive: Leading to a breakdown in family discipline and threatening the existence of the relationship.
- (ii) Constructive: Involving the utilization of latent potential to transition the family to a new, higher level of functioning.

The period of a family crisis is often the most challenging time for any couple, typically accompanied by sadness, turmoil, frustration, and eventual compromise. Spouses must recognize that these periods are universal and transient. The primary objective is to navigate safely through the crisis. While this is a difficult task, successfully overcoming it significantly strengthens the marriage. Rather than searching for a single "culprit," couples need to understand crisis as a shared relational challenge that requires mutual responsibility, communication, and adaptation. Interestingly, regardless of the age at which individuals marry, potential crisis periods begin from the day of the wedding. Furthermore, the underlying causes and themes of marital conflicts tend to remain relatively constant across different families. From these observations, two main conclusions can be drawn: first, an encouraging realization that searching for a single "culprit" is often futile; and second, a philosophical understanding that since crises are inevitable, couples must actively prepare for them.

Marital relationships may experience fluctuations in emotional closeness, communication, and satisfaction over time. Therefore, even in stable marriages, couples may experience temporary decreases in emotional intensity, which should be understood as part of the dynamic nature of family development rather than as an immediate sign of marital failure (Walsh, 1996).

Psychological research indicates that love has its own biorhythm: it is born, grows, strengthens, experiences pain, and heals. Therefore, even in the happiest marriages, there

are temporary cooling periods in emotional intensity. Passionate love does not always burn at its peak, and couples should anticipate these fluctuations.

A crisis period is characterized by tension and discord, demanding strong perseverance from both partners. Family crisis is commonly associated with stressful events, difficulties in fulfilling daily roles, persistent challenges in family responsibilities, and reduced social or emotional support (McCubbin et al., 1983; Al et al., 2011). A family is considered to be in a state of crisis if it experiences at least two or three of the following four interacting elements:

- (i) Experiencing highly stressful situations;
- (ii) Facing severe difficulties in completing daily tasks;
- (iii) The emergence of chronic challenges in fulfilling primary family responsibilities; and
- (iv) A significant lack of support.

The manifestation of these elements ensures that every family crisis is unique. Previous studies have also linked family crisis with psychological distress and psychosomatic symptoms, indicating that family problems may affect both emotional and physical well-being (Cermak, 1973). Individuals and families in crisis often exhibit specific physical, behavioral, and psychological signs.

- (i) Physical signs in individuals: Loss of appetite, lower back pain, breathing difficulties, cold extremities, gastrointestinal distress, dry mouth, headaches, elevated blood pressure, palpitations, fatigue, nausea, overeating, insomnia, and chest tightness.
- (ii) Behavioral changes: Anger, irritability, aggressive behavior, indecisiveness, memory blockages, confusion, fatigue when completing tasks, excessive smoking or alcohol consumption, substance abuse, and verbal outbursts.
- (iii) Psychological symptoms: Panic, rapid emotional distress, inability to think clearly, feelings of helplessness, self-doubt, lack of concentration, anxiety, disappointment, loneliness, and a desperate expectation of outside help.

When the entire family unit is in crisis, the following systemic signs are frequently observed:

- (i) Intense conflicts and excessive arguments;
- (ii) Destructive communication patterns, where spouses misunderstand or completely misinterpret each other's thoughts;
- (iii) Defensive aggression, where each partner views the other as the sole cause of the conflict;
- (iv) An abrupt refusal or significant decrease in sexual intimacy;
- (v) The husband withdrawing from solving household problems to avoid trouble;
- (vi) The wife neglecting her own needs to focus obsessively on managing the family;
- (vii) Extreme diligence or workaholism (often seen in men feeling displaced at home), leading them to spend excessive time at the office;
- (viii) A mutual lack of effort to please one another;
- (ix) Routine issues, particularly concerning child-rearing, escalating into hostility;
- (x) An inability or unwillingness to understand each other's feelings;
- (xi) A lack of desire to share personal problems or joys;
- (xii) Spending hours together (e.g., watching TV) without communicating;
- (xiii) A growing interest in individuals outside the marriage;
- (xiv) A deliberate effort to stay away from home as much as possible; and
- (xv) Emotional withdrawal and self-restraint from family interactions.

Not all of these symptoms occur simultaneously. Family crises unfold in stages, with signs manifesting differently at each point. While crisis periods can affect the entire family, they are generally temporary. This view is consistent with family resilience perspectives, which explain that families may experience disruption during crisis but can recover when adaptive resources and supportive relationships are strengthened (Walsh, 1996).

Various psychologists have modeled these stages differently. For instance, some family therapy perspectives identify several critical points in family development:

- (i) Pregnancy and the birth of the first child;
- (ii) The child's early speech development;
- (iii) The child beginning to communicate with the outside world (e.g., entering kindergarten or school);
- (iv) The child reaching adolescence;
- (v) The child leaving home in adulthood;
- (vi) The child's marriage and the introduction of a new child-in-law to the family;
- (vii) The onset of menopause in women;
- (viii) A decrease in sexual activity in men;
- (ix) Parents transitioning into the role of grandparents; and
- (x) The death of one of the spouses.

In this study, measuring the degree of marital satisfaction was considered important for identifying the psychological condition of marital relationships during crisis-prone periods. A higher marital satisfaction score reflects a higher level of perceived satisfaction in marital life. The data presented in **Table 3** demonstrates that the level of marital satisfaction varies depending on gender and the duration of the marriage. During the initial phase of marriage (the first 3 years), both men and women report a high level of marital satisfaction. However, during the 4 to 7-year mark, satisfaction levels significantly decrease for both genders. The high satisfaction in the early years can be attributed to strong emotional novelty, psychological "insatiability" for each other, and relative freedom from heavier responsibilities, such as complex financial management or child-rearing.

Table 3. The level of satisfaction with marriage among couples.

	WHO LIVED TOGETHER FOR UP TO 3 YEARS	THOSE WHO LIVED TOGETHER FOR 4-7 YEARS
Men	72.00	51.00
Women	71.30	52.20

Conversely, families in the 4 to 7-year bracket appear to represent a crisis-prone group in this study. The decline in their satisfaction scores highlights the need for targeted socio-psychological support. One possible explanation is that this period may coincide with increasing family responsibilities, reduced parental support, independent household management, and the birth or care of young children. These conditions may increase psychological tension and contribute to lower marital satisfaction during this specific period. This interpretation is consistent with family adaptation and resilience perspectives, which emphasize that changes in family roles and responsibilities can increase stress during critical family transitions (McCubbin et al., 1983; Walsh, 1996).

The effectiveness of marital relations largely depends on the manifestation of "mutual understanding," "emotional connection," and "mutual respect" (McCubbin et al., 1983; Walsh, 1996). These internal psychological factors dictate whether a couple feels united or isolated. For a marriage to succeed, spouses must share complementary interests and deeply understand each other's psychological needs. The indicators for these factors (mutual understanding, emotional aspiration, and mutual respect) are relatively high in Group I (up to 3 years) but drop noticeably in Group II (4-7 years), as detailed in **Table 4**. Mutual understanding at the beginning of the marriage scores 18.03 points for men and 19.65 points for women. For couples married between 4 and 7 years, these figures drop to 15.55 and 17.37, respectively. Generally, women score higher in mutual understanding than men. The sharp overall decline in Group II underscores the crisis nature of this period. The transition to independent living and the complexities of raising young children create substantial difficulties, leading to more frequent conflicts and, historically, a higher rate of divorce. Preparing young people psychologically for these specific developmental hurdles is essential to prevent negative outcomes.

Regarding mutual respect (Factor A), early marriage reveals high respect scores from men towards their wives (26.05 points). However, in Group II, men's respect scores drop sharply by 6.12 points (down to 19.93), whereas women's scores only decrease by 2.92 points. This difference may indicate that changes in family roles, parenting responsibilities, and household demands during the 4 to 7-year period influence the way spouses perceive and evaluate each other. Rather than indicating a single cause, this pattern suggests that marital respect may be affected by the accumulation of daily responsibilities and changing expectations within the family.

Table 4. Indicators of the level of mutual understanding, emotional aspiration, and mutual respect in couples.

FACTORS	P (MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING)		E (EMOTIONAL ASPIRATION)		A (MUTUAL RESPECT)	
	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN
Up to 3 years	18.03	19.65	25.87	26.07	26.05	24.82
4-7 years	15.55	17.37	24.48	24.37	19.93	21.90

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the comprehensive literature review and the empirical findings obtained from this study, the following scientific conclusions can be drawn:

- (i) **The Family as a Complex Psychological Structure:** The family unit functions as a complex, dynamic structure where the nature of interpersonal relations depends heavily on multiple factors, most notably the individual psychological characteristics of its members. This inherent complexity ensures that the study of family dynamics and domestic challenges remains a constantly urgent and evolving area of research.
- (ii) **Subjective Nature of Marital Relations:** Interpersonal relationships within a family are primarily anchored by the marital bond. Because these interactions are highly dependent on subjective perceptions and the degree of mutual understanding between spouses, misalignments in these psychological areas explain why crises inevitably arise within the family system.
- (iii) **Temporal Vulnerability to Crises:** The most pronounced manifestation of family crises occurs within the first ten years of married life, specifically peaking between the third

and seventh years. This vulnerability is largely due to the psychological difficulties spouses face when adapting to a shared lifestyle and developing accurate mutual perceptions.

- (iv) **Decline in Relational Quality During Crises:** During a family crisis, there is a sharp and measurable decrease in marital satisfaction, mutual understanding, emotional connection, and mutual respect. This systematic decline in foundational emotional aspects, in turn, accelerates and intensifies the critical trajectory of family conflicts.
- (v) **Imbalance in Role Distribution:** The crisis-prone course of marital relations is further exacerbated by an imbalance and divergence of opinions regarding the distribution of family roles and household responsibilities.
- (vi) **The Role of Psychological Literacy:** Ultimately, whether family relations take a crisis-driven or a calm and constructive path depends on how deeply family members, particularly spouses, understand themselves and each other. Fostering resilience relies heavily on how well individuals assimilate and apply psychological knowledge concerning personality dynamics and interpersonal communication.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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