

# Strengthening the Family as a Support System in the Recovery of Individuals with Mental Disorders: A Family Counseling Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

The family serves as the primary social unit and cornerstone support system in the recovery journey of individuals with mental disorders (*orang dengan gangguan jiwa / ODGJ*). However, families often face significant challenges, including low mental health literacy, pervasive social stigma, and psychological distress, which impede their ability to provide optimal care. This qualitative study aimed to deeply explore the role of the family as a support system for individuals with mental disorders through a family counseling approach within a rehabilitation institution. Data were collected via in-depth interviews with family members and counselors, direct observations of family-patient interactions, and documentary analysis of client progress reports. The findings reveal that prior to counseling, families exhibited adaptive difficulties characterized by rejection, shame, maladaptive communication patterns, and high caregiving stress. Following participation in family counseling, constructive transformations occurred, including heightened mental health literacy, improved communication dynamics, and enhanced conflict and stress management capacities. These improvements directly contributed to patient treatment adherence, behavioral stability, and reduced social withdrawal. This study concludes that family counseling is an effective, systemic intervention that fundamentally strengthens the family's capacity to function as a sustainable support system, facilitating both institutional rehabilitation and subsequent community reintegration.

## Introduction

In the era of globalization, mental disorders have demonstrated a significantly increasing trend. Various pressures of modern life—such as employment challenges,

familial disharmony, economic hardship, bereavement, and broader social issues—serve as major contributing factors to heightened vulnerability to mental health conditions. To date, mental disorders remain a critical issue, adversely impacting not only individual psychological well-being but also significantly disrupting social functioning and familial dynamics.

In Indonesia, the prevalence of mental disorders remains notably high. According to data from the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, these conditions are distributed across various provinces, with pronounced figures in regions such as DKI Jakarta, Central Sulawesi, Bangka Belitung Islands, South Kalimantan, East Nusa Tenggara, Central Kalimantan, and Central Java. The prevalence of mental disorders tends to escalate with age, demonstrating the lowest rates in the 25–34 age group and peaking among the elderly population. Furthermore, the proportion of household members experiencing mental disorders is relatively higher in rural areas compared to urban settings. Nationally, the prevalence of severe mental disorders is estimated at approximately 7% of the total population, affecting hundreds of thousands of individuals. Central Java, in particular, records one of the highest prevalence rates of schizophrenia at 8.7%, ranking among the top five provinces nationwide. Additionally, Riskesdas 2018 data indicate tens of thousands of households in Central Java with members experiencing mental health disorders, including schizophrenia and emotional mental disorders among individuals aged 15 years and above. Although treatment coverage for individuals with schizophrenia in this region is relatively high, this situation underscores the ongoing necessity for sustained support, particularly from the family as the individual's primary social environment (Khasanah et al., 2024).

Families frequently serve as the primary component in the recovery process of individuals with mental disorders (*orang dengan gangguan jiwa* / ODGJ), even though under certain conditions, they may not yet function as an optimal source of mental health support. Adequate family support—encompassing emotional, instrumental, and informational dimensions—has been proven to contribute to enhanced quality of life, improved treatment adherence, and a reduced risk of relapse among individuals with mental disorders. In practice, however, families are not always capable of fulfilling this role effectively. A lack of knowledge, ineffective communication skills, emotional burden, and the pervasive stigma surrounding mental illness frequently present significant barriers to families providing appropriate care and accompaniment (Lumeohe et al., 2025).

These circumstances highlight the imperative for interventions that target not only the individual but also the family system. As the most fundamental social unit, the family plays a strategic role in supporting individual development, wherein harmonious family relationships serve as a crucial foundation for cultivating physical, emotional, and psychological well-being (Syam et al., 2025). Family counseling emerges as a highly relevant approach to assist families in understanding complex dynamics, improving communication quality, and developing adaptive problem-solving strategies to effectively support individuals with mental disorders.

Family counseling is a systemic approach aimed at understanding and addressing familial issues by improving interaction patterns and communication among members. Rather than focusing solely on the individual as the locus of the problem, this approach

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views the family as an interconnected system whose members mutually influence one another. Nichols & Schwartz (2008) emphasize that family counseling is oriented toward altering dysfunctional relational patterns while restructuring family relationships. The modifications pursued through family counseling encompass both first-order change—which tends to be superficial and temporary in nature—and second-order change, which operates at a deeper level by transforming the structural relationships and core dynamics within the family system (Prasetiyowati & Habsy, 2024).

Through the active engagement of families in the counseling process, a more supportive environment can be fostered, thereby enabling the rehabilitation process for individuals with mental disorders to proceed in an optimal and sustainable manner. Accordingly, this study focuses on analyzing the role of the family as a support system for individuals with mental disorders from a family counseling perspective. Specifically, this research aims to delineate how family counseling can strengthen the family's capacity to support the recovery process of individuals with mental disorders within rehabilitation institutions.

## Method

This study employed a qualitative research design with a descriptive approach to conduct an in-depth exploration of the experiences, perceptions, and relational dynamics between families and individuals with mental disorders (*orang dengan gangguan jiwa / ODGJ*) throughout the rehabilitation process. This approach was selected because the study focused on understanding the underlying meanings, procedural stages, and shifts in family interaction patterns following participation in family counseling services. The research was conducted at a rehabilitation institution that provides comprehensive support services for individuals with mental disorders alongside family counseling programs integrated into the rehabilitation framework. The primary focus of this study was to examine the significance of the family's role as a support system through the lens of the family counseling process.

Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentary analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore the lived experiences of family members and counselors regarding the observable changes following the family counseling interventions. Direct observations were employed to examine firsthand the interactions between individuals with mental disorders and their families, as well as the relational dynamics emerging during the rehabilitation process. Finally, documentary analysis served to provide supporting data, including records of counseling sessions and client progress reports.

## Results

The findings of this study indicate that the family plays a critical and strategic role in supporting the recovery process of individuals with mental disorders (*orang dengan gangguan jiwa / ODGJ*) during rehabilitation. The support provided by families manifests across several dimensions, namely emotional, instrumental, and

informational support (Ramadhani & Yusuf, 2025). Emotional support is reflected through the acceptance of the individual's condition, the provision of continuous care and attention, and efforts to foster a sense of security and psychological comfort. Instrumental support is evidenced by family involvement in meeting basic needs, such as accompanying individuals to medical check-ups, ensuring medication adherence, and providing financial assistance. Meanwhile, informational support is operationalized through family efforts to acquire knowledge regarding mental health disorders and strictly adhere to recommendations and directives provided by professionals at the rehabilitation institution.

Nevertheless, not all families are capable of fulfilling this supportive role effectively, with a subset experiencing ongoing difficulties in providing consistent care. Prior to receiving family counseling services, several families demonstrated substantial challenges in adapting to the condition of the individual with a mental disorder. This was characterized by expressions of rejection, shame, fear, and confusion when responding to the individual's behaviors. Consequently, these circumstances led to ineffective communication patterns, heightened relational conflict, a tendency to blame the individual, diminished empathy, and instances where families relinquished full responsibility for the recovery process to the rehabilitation institution without active personal engagement.

Following participation in family counseling, the study revealed constructive transformations, particularly regarding enhanced family literacy on mental health disorders, strengthened communication skills, and an improved capacity to manage psychological distress. Families began to display higher levels of acceptance toward the individual's condition, reduced blame-seeking behaviors, and a stronger orientation toward providing emotional support. Family counseling also enabled families to formulate more adaptive strategies for navigating internal conflicts and managing stress throughout the caregiving process. Furthermore, active family engagement in counseling contributed significantly to the overall success of the rehabilitation program. Individuals with mental disorders who received active family support exhibited more stable clinical and behavioral progress—characterized by a reduction in aggressive behaviors, enhanced treatment compliance, improved adaptive functioning, and the establishment of more harmonious family relations. Ultimately, these positive dynamics reinforced self-confidence among individuals with mental disorders and mitigated their tendency toward social withdrawal.

## Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce the premise that the family constitutes the primary social system exerting a profound influence on an individual's psychological well-being. Framed within Bowen's Family Systems Theory, individuals are conceptualized as interdependent entities within a holistic system; thus, dysfunction or pathology experienced by one family member directly impacts the equilibrium and relational dynamics of the entire family structure. Consequently, the recovery process of individuals with mental disorders (*orang dengan gangguan jiwa* / ODGJ) is contingent not solely upon individual-level factors, but also significantly influenced by the quality

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of social support, communication patterns, and interpersonal dynamics established within the family environment (Abdillah & Tohari, 2025).

The family functions as the cornerstone support system during the recovery journey of individuals with mental disorders. Active family involvement serves as a critical determinant in maintaining behavioral stability among these individuals. This outcome aligns with prior literature indicating that family presence provides substantial emotional benefits that directly shape patient behaviors. Emotional support provided by the family encompasses care, affection, empathy, a sense of security, and active accompaniment during medical treatment. These multifaceted supportive behaviors play a pivotal role in boosting patient motivation to adhere to treatment regimens while mitigating feelings of hopelessness throughout recovery (Ekayanti, 2021). Consistent family support significantly enhances the quality of life of individuals with mental disorders while simultaneously reducing relapse rates. Furthermore, robust family support holds the potential to drive family resilience, restoration, and growth when navigating adverse life circumstances (Maulinda & Purnamasari, 2020).

Despite the strategic role of the family as a primary support system, this study demonstrates that the operationalization of family support continues to encounter substantial obstacles. Earlier studies emphasize that limited family mental health literacy, compounded by pervasive social stigma, severely compromises the quality of support provided. As a result, family communication patterns tend to become maladaptive and devoid of empathy, thereby hindering the overall success of the rehabilitation process. In line with these findings, Ginting & Ginting (2026) highlighted that mental health literacy within the Indonesian public remains relatively low, which adversely impacts the efficacy of informal caregivers and ultimately decelerates the treatment and recovery trajectory (Imanti & Rumbi, 2022).

Family counseling has proven effective in augmenting family mental health literacy while bolstering their capacity to cultivate empathy, enhance communication, and establish more adaptive interactional patterns. Willis (as cited in Dwiyantri & Roviati, 2023) emphasized that family counseling functions to structure intra-familial communication, enabling members to achieve mutual understanding. This, in turn, elevates overall family relationship quality and fosters a conducive environment essential for successful rehabilitation. Moreover, family counseling contributes significantly to mitigating internal family stigma. Perspectives previously rooted in shame and social avoidance gradually evolve into genuine acceptance.

Taken together, the findings of this study substantiate the thesis that optimal rehabilitation outcomes for individuals with mental disorders cannot be fully realized without the active involvement of the family as a support system. Families equipped through counseling interventions demonstrate greater preparedness to navigate various challenges throughout the recovery process and possess enhanced capacity to provide sustained support as individuals reintegrate into broader community life.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the family plays a vital role as the primary support system in the recovery of individuals with mental disorders (*orang dengan gangguan jiwa / ODGJ*) during rehabilitation. Family support encompasses emotional, instrumental, and informational dimensions, which collectively contribute to maintaining behavioral stability, improving treatment adherence, and reinforcing patient motivation throughout the recovery process. Nevertheless, the execution of this caregiving role continues to face significant impediments, including low mental health literacy, social stigma, and psychological stress, all of which compromise the quality of communication and caregiving within the family.

Following participation in family counseling, more positive transformations were observed, evidenced by increased mental health literacy, improved communication patterns, and enhanced family capacity to manage stress and conflict. Consequently, family counseling is proven to be an effective and strategic approach to strengthening the family's capacity as the principal support system for individuals with mental disorders, both during institutional rehabilitation and throughout their subsequent reintegration into community life.

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