Empathic Communication Training to Increase Family Resilience

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Abstract

As the smallest unit of society, the family inevitably encounters various challenges in supporting each member as they navigate their personal developmental tasks. As such, families must develop the ability to persevere through obstacles and adverse events, maintaining their function and role in society while demonstrating family resilience. This study uses an experimental method to investigate the effects of empathic communication training on increasing family resilience. Six families comprising 15 individuals participated in the study conducted in Kulon Progo, Indonesia. The assessment was conducted using a resilience scale and focused group discussion. The result demonstrates a significant increase in family resilience (Z= -2.226, p <0.05) following the emphatic communication training. Therefore, empathic communication training is a feasible alternative for enhancing family resilience.

Keywords: Empathic communication; family resilience; training

Introduction

The family plays a significant role in shaping a child's personality from an early age, as Chandio & Ali (2019) highlighted through Parson's theory. The family serves as the most important institution for socialization, providing essential basic needs and guidance on cultural and social values that guide children throughout their lives toward maturity. The family is also considered a laboratory for its members' social, psychological, and biological development and care. In fulfilling this role, the couple (husband & wife) and other family members must meet important tasks such as meeting basic physical needs (clothing, food, shelter), developing coalitions through marriages and child socialization, and resolving crises that can arise in connection with illness and other life changes (Glick, Raid, Heru, Ascherl, 2016).

In many parts of the world, particularly in developing and underdeveloped countries, individuals rely heavily on their families to meet their basic needs, such as social and psychological support, food,

shelter, nurturing, and moral guidance (Chandio & Ali, 2019). One of the primary functions of the family is to care for children until they reach adulthood. Thus, the family system must ensure mastery of psychosocial tasks from every phase in the family life cycle. One reason for its importance is that stressors occurring at each stage can interfere with achieving normal developmental tasks (Glick, Raid, Heru, Ascherl, 2016). For instance, Marilena (2015) discovered that children from families with a harmonious and stimulating environment in terms of education had a positive effect on their ability to adapt to school and social environments.

A disorganized and deviant family environment has been shown to adversely affect children's school adaptability. Inadequate social and economic stability within a family can impede the future development of their children. At the same time, negative influences from peers can also negatively impact a child's behavior, leading them to emulate the actions of their friends. Effective primary socialization should therefore aim to discourage antisocial behaviors, promote goal-oriented schooling, cultivate ethical values, and prevent biological challenges, all of which contribute to the development of a well-rounded personality in children (Chandio & Ali, 2019).

Children who complete developmental tasks at each stage of their development can lay the groundwork for success and efficacy in the later phases of life. For example, children who establish strong relationships with caregivers during early childhood tend to acquire valuable skills to apply to their relationships with peers later on. Liu et al. (2022) found that strong parent-child relationships were positively related to the social skills of preschool children. Similarly, Brummelman et al. (2019) found that gentle physical contact from parents can reduce children's implicit attention to social threats and increase the confidence of children who experience social anxiety.

Successful completion of developmental tasks involves the child's ability to comprehend both verbal and nonverbal communication, effectively express themselves, negotiate by taking turns, delay gratification, demonstrate tolerance, and resolve conflicts, as these skills serve as the foundation for mastering more complex tasks in future developments (Day, 2010). Ulferts (2020) reviewed 29 meta-studies and 81 quantitative studies on the developmental effects of various parenting styles and
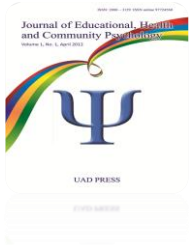
dimensions. Findings suggested that warm parenting that provides children autonomy and structure is crucial for children's and adolescents' healthy and prosperous development in various domains.

The family's initial socialization process can prepare children to function effectively in the larger world. In the family context, children acquire knowledge, skills, and values that enable them to become influential members of groups and communities (Maccovy in Berns, 2013). However, as Day (2010) points out, family life can be a double-edged sword, as it can provide love, affection, and fulfillment of needs, but it can also lead to chaos, oppression, and violence. The chaotic conditions during childhood can result in significant losses, as Glick, Raid, Heru, and Ascherl (2016) noted, where neglect, trauma, and chaos during early childhood can cause permanent damage to the structure and function of the brain.

Establishing a functional family that can maintain balance and effectively copes with various challenges is daunting. Arditti (2015) notes that all families face problems stemming from internal or external changes, developmental transitions, and inherent challenges in certain caregiving arrangements. Episodic family problems can arise due to (1) inadequate coping with family tasks in the current phase, (2) the need to transition to a new family phase, and (3) stress caused by unexpected adverse events (Glick, Raid, Heru, Ascherl, 2016). Yan and Zhou's (2016) study found that child development significantly impacts work-family conflict in working couples. Work-family conflict is most severe when children are very young, as parents face difficulties balancing childcare tasks and family expenses. However, family experience the most apparent work enrichment when children aged 7-17. Given these issues, families need to develop the ability to survive and function effectively when facing obstacles. Surviving adversity in family life reflects family resilience, enabling families to fulfill their roles appropriately.

Psychologists have various interpretations of the term "resilience." According to Ballenger-Browning and Johnson (2010), resilience is a psychological process developed to respond to intense life stressors that can facilitate healthy functioning. Reich, Zautra, and Hall (2010) describe resilience as a dynamic process of successful adaptation in terms of developmental psychopathology when faced with danger or difficulty. Glover (2009) suggests the notion of resilience in the broader context of

individual conditions, precisely the universal capacity that allows individuals, groups, or communities to prevent, minimize, or overcome losses due to difficulties or threats.

The concept of resilience is not limited to individuals, as Walsh (Pogosyan, 2019) formulates resilience from the family context. Resilience is families' ability to survive and rise from life's disruptive challenges, becoming stronger and more powerful (resourceful). Walsh (2016) identifies three processes in the family that contribute to resilience: (1) The belief system in the family, including finding meaning in bad events, having a sense of coherence, a positive perspective or attitude, and the presence of faith and spirituality; (2) Organizational patterns, such as flexibility, capacity for change, attachment (cohesiveness) - structural/emotional attachment, and social and economic resources, and a vast network; (3) Communication, including openness, clarity, tolerance, encouragement, expression of emotions and interests, fostering a spirit of problem-solving, being proactive and collaborative, and allowing family members to approach difficulties with empathy and resources.

Although family resilience is frequently discussed, research on this subject remains limited. Several qualitative studies on family resilience have been conducted in Indonesia, including research by Rahmanawati (2019), Casmini (2020), Ediati, Salma, and Kaloeti (2020). However, there has been little research on interventions designed to enhance family resilience involving all family members: father, mother, and child. Therefore, this study aims to address the gap in the literature by applying empathic communication training to increase family resilience.

Literature Review

Family resilience

The rapidly changing world creates new challenges for families. McCarthy, Hooper & Gillies (2014) have described two conditions related to change and challenges experienced by families living with children and young people. Firstly, change cannot be avoided in life and is often highly challenging. Secondly, problems, conflicts, and painful experiences are a general description of the lives of children that occur in the context of family and close relationships. Therefore, families in modern life face different challenges than those in the past. Families with various configurations will successfully

overcome the challenges because an effective family process becomes the most important factor to function healthily and achieve resilience (Walsh, 2006).

Luthar et al. (Mackay, 2003) define family resilience as a dynamic process that includes positive adaptation in the context of significant difficulties. This understanding combines several key features of the concept, including resilience as a dynamic adaptation process, and summarizes the idea of successful engagement with risk. A resilient family is not only able to overcome the negative effects of significant problems but also to grow better, as stated by Walsh (2016). Family resilience is the ability of the family to survive and rise from life's disruptive challenges so that the family becomes stronger and more resourceful.

Family resilience refers to coping and adaptation as a functional unit (Walsh, 2016). A systems perspective makes it possible to understand how the family deals with and manages disturbing experiences, mediates stress, and effectively reorganizes effectively and moves forward, all of which will affect the immediate and long-term adaptation, survivability, and well-being of each family unit.

Walsh (2016) identifies three family processes originating from the family belief system, the organizational pattern, and communication. Firstly, shared family beliefs help family members find meaning in adversity and foster hope and a positive outlook. The foundation of faith or spirituality within those beliefs provides individuals with greater hope, helps them see the crisis as a transformative opportunity to grow, and fosters a can-do attitude. Secondly, flexible organizational pattern refers to family structures that are mutually supportive and connected. Resilient families have flexibility and stability—they are open to change while the structure remains preserved and reliable. This engagement facilitates building security and collaboration within the family, and social networking is available when needed. Lastly, communication within the family highlights the following characteristics: Open and clear, tolerant and encouraging, emotions and interests are expressed freely, fostering a spirit of proactive and collaborative problem solving, members' families can approach difficulties with empathy and resources.

Good communication facilitates all aspects of family functioning and resilience (Walsh, 2016). Communication involves the transmission of beliefs, information exchange, emotional expression, and problem-solving processes (Ryan et al., in Walsh, 2015). Olson and Gorall (in Walsh, 2016) examine critical elements in good communication, namely specific skills in speaking and listening, self-disclosure, clarity, tracking continuity, respect, and regard. Speaking skills are speaking for oneself, not for others. Listening skills include attentive focus and empathic response. Self-disclosure includes sharing information and feelings about oneself, important experiences, and relationships.

Establishing empathic communication skills is crucial in families, given that family members differ in their level of development, age, and roles. It is common for differences to exist between children and parents in families, and as such, it is essential to foster an atmosphere of mutual trust. Walsh (2015) suggests that this can be facilitated by sharing open and empathetic emotions. (Walsh, 2015).

Empathic communication

Communication skills are crucial in fulfilling parental responsibilities and caring for children. Parent-child communication is a continuous process that takes place throughout the family's life. According to Koprowska (2008), communication is interactive and always occurs within the context of a relationship. Therefore, understanding the theory of interaction is necessary to distinguish between effective and ineffective communication. The quality of relationships and communication are closely related, as effective communication fosters positive relationships between parents and children.

West and Turner (2008) define communication as a social process involving symbols to create and interpret meanings within an environment. McPheat (2010) describes communication as a process that involves creating and conveying ideas, with communication effectiveness depending on the richness of these ideas. Griffin (2012) defines communication as a relational process involving creating and interpreting messages that elicit a response.

Rogers, as cited by Gladding (2018) and Velleman & Aris (2010), defines empathy as the ability to enter into the world of other people's experiences and perceive them as if they were one's own world without losing the "as if" quality. Building on Rogers's definition, Welfel and Patterson, as cited

by Gladding (2018), emphasize that empathy requires two specific skills: perception and communication.

Rosenberg (in Johnsen & Ennals, 2012) argues that empathic communication is a form of non-violent communication that involves the operationalization of mutual communication learning, using the heart as a symbol of emotions. When individuals activate their emotions, they can actively listen to themselves and others. The term 'active listening' stated by Rosenberg has the same meaning as the term 'non-violent listening' put forward by Rogers (Dietrich, 2013), which is listening that is not limited to 'listening', but empties the mind and listens with all of itself, presents with all attention and his feelings by getting rid of servitude in the form of prejudice, scientific theory, intellectual understanding, etc. Non-violent communication can help individuals overcome patterns of self-defense, withdrawal, or attack that stems from judgments and criticisms. This, in turn, can lead to a shift in perceptions of oneself and others, as well as a transformation in one's relationships and intentions towards others (Rosenberg, as cited in Arrington, 2007).

Walsh (2016) argues that sharing complex emotions with empathy is crucial for building resilience. The message is conveyed in an appropriate way to appreciate feelings and differences. Acceptance of uncertainty, ambivalence, and disagreement reduces members' resistance to opening up. Resilient families have relational processes that facilitate painful emotional expressions related to family crises, whereas families with low resilience struggle to express emotions (Cohen, Slonim, Finzi & Leichtentritt, in Walsh, 2016). Tariq's (2018) research shows the importance of interpersonal communication between children and parents in shaping family resilience and strengthening the family's functioning when facing increasingly severe challenges. Carr's (2012) study also emphasizes the significance of communication in a married couple, where families with a balance between cohesion and flexibility, open communication, and overall satisfaction are the most resilient.

Effective communication is crucial for developing family resilience, but in Indonesia, there has been little research on how to improve this important skill. To address this gap, the current study hypothesizes that providing empathic communication training could enhance the resilience of families living in the Kulon Progo district of the Special Region of Yogyakarta.
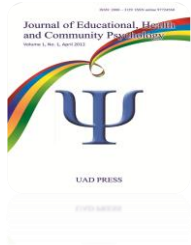
Method

Design

This experimental study used a single-group pre-test and post-test design (Azwar, 2004). The instrument used in the pre-test and post-test was the family resilience scale.

Participants This research involved the family as a system. Thus, the participants consisted of parent and children sub-systems. Families that participated as research subjects were those who had adolescents aged from 13 to 19 years olds and lived in Kulon Progo district area of the Special Region of Yogyakarta. Specifically, the subjects in this study consisted of 7 families whose composition was six teenagers aged 13 years and 12 parents consisting of 4 fathers/husbands and six mothers/wives, 4 of whom were present with their partners. Informed consent was given to all adult research subjects, while those under 18 years old received parental consent.

Table 1
Characteristics of subjects

Status	Age	Gender	Note
Child	13 Years	4 females, 2 males	-
Parent	39-50 Years	6 females, 4 males	Consists of 4 married couples and 2 wives without a partner

Research Instruments
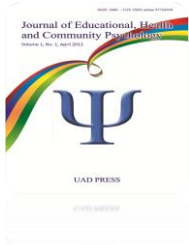
Family Resilience Scale

We used the family resilience scale, modified from the family resilience scale developed by Walsh (Rocchi et al., 2017). The scale consisted of 21 items, divided into three aspects: belief in the family (11 items), organizational patterns (14 items), and communication (6 items). Modifications were made by translating the scale into Bahasa Indonesia and adding items that were deemed more appropriate to the Indonesian context. The results of the scale trial showed a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.913.

Empathic Communication Training Module

The module used in this study was a modification of the empathic communication module for teachers and employees of inclusive schools developed by Sholichah and Hidayati (2016). Modifications were made to match the needs of residents of Kulon Progo, Special Region of Yogyakarta, which was obtained from the initial assessment on January 23, 2019. The module structure was composed of several sections delivered in 4 meetings across 9 sessions, as stated in the following module overview (Table 2):

Table 2
Module overview

Session	Objective
Session 1: Building rapport.	1. To build trust between participants and the facilitator team; getting to know each other. 2. To identify expectations for training, and establish group norms
Session 2: Understanding communication	Participants understand the meaning of communication and communication barriers.
Session 3: Factors that determine the success of communication	1. Participants understand the role of a communicant and communicator. 2. Participants understand the characteristics and skills that must be mastered in empathic communication.
Session 4: How to manage emotions when dealing with stress?	1. Participants can recognize their condition when experiencing conflict in establishing communication, 2. Participants can use relaxation techniques to manage emotions to deal with stress.
Session 5: For you with all my love	1. To identify problems in communication based on participants' position in the family (parents VS children) 2. To improve the skills to express themselves through written and verbal expressions as a means to build trust between family members.
Session 6: Roleplay establishes empathic communication	Participants can practice micro-skills, respond to the other person in an empathic way, and identify skills that have been mastered/not yet.
Session 7: With family, I can!	Participants use their communication skills to collaborate with family members to solve problems and overcome obstacles to increase the flexibility of the family organization.

Session	Objective
Session 8: From our family, we go together	1. Participants develop the skills to express opinions and negotiate with others from within and outside the family. 2. Understanding and overcoming differences between family members strengthen the organization of the family.
Session 9: Closing, Express Yourself	1. Participants learn to build synergistic communication with their families to produce collaborative works in the form of images, as fellow participants can express themselves through positive/supportive words with each other. 2. Participants give feedback or evaluate the benefits of the training.

Research implementation procedure.

The study was conducted in two stages, namely the preparation and implementation of research:

1. Preparation stage.

The preparation phase consisted of several activities including: preparation of the measurement tools and modules, testing of the measurement tools' validity, conducting a research module trial, training facilitators and co-facilitators, as well as selecting the research subject.

2. Implementation of research: The study was conducted in four meetings held once a week.

Each meeting is held within 120 -180 minutes and is guided by four psychologists who serve as facilitators and co-facilitators. Table 2 shows the complete training procedure.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from the resilience scale were analyzed using the Wilcoxon non-parametric statistical sign-rank test. The analysis was carried out using SPSS 17.0 for windows program. Data obtained from the process during the training were analyzed qualitatively.

Result

Pre-test and post-test data obtained from the family resilience scale was analyzed statistically using the Wilcoxon test analysis. The results of the data analysis showed Z = -2.226 (p <0.05), suggesting that there is a significant difference in the level of family resilience before and after receiving empathic communication training. Thus, it can be concluded that empathic training can increase family resilience.

The categorization of research data was accomplished through a comparison of scores obtained from measurements of resilience in subjects with hypothetical scores serving as a reference point. The objective was to establish a comparison between family resilience scores prior to training (pretest), and subsequent to training (posttest).

Table 2
Pre-test and post-test data categorization

Norm	Category	Interval	Pretest		Posttest	
			f	%	f	%
X < μ-1 σ	low	X < 65, 34	0	0	0	0
μ - 1σ ≤ μ + 1σ	moderate	65,34≥ X<102,66	15	88.9	6	33,3
X ≥ μ + 1σ	high	X≥102,6	3	11,1	12	66,7

Table 2 shows a notable shift in the research data categories before and after the training. Before the training, the majority of research subjects (88.9%) fell under the medium category for resilience, with only a small proportion (11.1%) in the high category. However, following the study, only 33.3% of subjects were in the moderate category, while the remaining 66.7% moved up to the high category.

Qualitative data were obtained from the training processes. Initially, an awkward atmosphere was noticeable among some participants, particularly children who were in the same forum as their parents. However, as the participants had the opportunity to express their problems during the focused group discussion (FGD), the atmosphere began to dissipate. Children became more willing

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to express their experiences. In the first meeting, mothers expressed several complaints about their children's shyness, withdrawal, and sibling rivalry. Meanwhile, during the special group, children reported unfair parental treatment, violence from their parents when they acted contrary to their parents' wishes, and concern about burdening their parents when expressing their desires.

During the second meeting, the participants looked more relaxed in expressing their experiences. The homework assignment prompted them to pay closer attention to communication patterns within their families, allowing them to articulate their problems more specifically. The most common issue raised was related to economic conditions. Mrs. En reported that communication with her husband had become less intense. She loves fashion and mentioned that she had to restrain herself from buying certain items out of concern that it would strain her husband's finances. However, Mrs. En would express her wishes when she knew that her husband had more money. On the other hand, Mr. B, Mrs. En's husband, mentioned that communication within his family was strained. His wife would argue with him when he spoke. Mr. B wants his wife to listen to him first, understand what he is conveying, and then respond to it. The lack of open communication between the couple prevented them from understanding each other's underlying problems.

Most couples reported that economic problems were considered a serious family issue. However, not all couples view it as an obstacle to communication. For instance, Mr. H and Mrs. W attempted to express their thoughts to each other despite not constantly receiving the expected response. They persisted in having discussions that led to solutions. The economic difficulties experienced by parents seemingly affected their children, resulting in hesitancy when seeking additional resources for their education.

The importance of empathy gained greater recognition among the participants as they reflected on their experiences with respected figures in their lives. This reflection allowed the participants to identify behaviors worthy of emulation. During the meeting, the understanding of empathy was further strengthened when three participants expressed their feelings through letters addressed to their spouses and children or from children to parents. The letters were read aloud in a supportive atmosphere, enabling the participants to listen directly to each other's emotions expressed more

empathetically. For example, one wife learned to communicate more effectively with her husband, shifting from a statement suggesting her husband never noticed her to a more direct request: "*when I talk to you, I want you to look and listen to me*." Likewise, the husband learned to thank his wife for staying with him through difficult economic circumstances. The children also appeared relieved and expressed that they had previously hesitated to share their feelings because of their parent's financial situation.

This atmosphere of openness at the meeting encouraged participants to share more about their household experiences. For instance, Mrs. N, who tended to be authoritarian and dominant in dealing with her children, recognized that excessive attention to academic achievement has made her children anxious and afraid of failure. As a result, the children were unhappy, and their academic performance suffered.

The process of expressing themselves through letter writing became a valuable means for family members to communicate things that were difficult to express verbally. This type of communication was akin to a transaction between family members, as described by Pennebaker and Evans (2014). Transactional writing is aimed at exchanging thoughts, beliefs, and feelings with others and oneself. Thus, in transactional writing, individuals communicate their messages while considering the perspectives of others.

Reading letters directly in front of their intended recipient provided a gateway for understanding the thoughts and feelings exchanged between family members. As a result, participants recognized both the strengths and obstacles within their families that had previously gone unidentified due to an inability to communicate openly. Discovering family strengths is crucial for building family resilience, as Lietz (2007) found that higher levels of family strength predicted better functioning within family systems.

The fourth meeting was conducted in the form of outbound activities. From the onset, all participants displayed enthusiasm for the activity. Those who attended the group with their families were eager to showcase the chants they had created through singing and dancing. Each group was tasked with

visiting three different locations, where they were given assignments aimed at strengthening communication and cooperation among family members. Although not all tasks could be completed perfectly within the specified time, there was strong cohesion and cooperation among all family members as they worked together.

Improved communication skills within the family has a positive impact on increasing positive beliefs that problems occurring within the family could be overcome together, leading to positive outcomes. Open communication within the family has fostered a sense of security in children, allowing them to express all their problems without fearing negative responses from their parents. As a result, children feel more optimistic about their future, knowing they have parental support and would not have to face problems alone.

The positive impact of the training was mentioned by the father's group, who expressed confidence in their ability to build a harmonious family after improving communication within their family. This improvement resulted in a decrease in conflicts between family members and a greater ability to resolve problems through negotiation. Fathers described the atmosphere in their family as an '*adhem*' (Javanese for cool or peaceful), suggesting that similar training should be provided to other villagers.

Discussion

The hypothesis test results indicate a significant difference between family resilience before and after empathic communication training, indicated by the Z value of -2.226 (p <0.05). These findings suggest that empathic training could increase family resilience, which is essential for families to overcome life's challenges and become stronger and more resourceful (Walsh, 2016). According to Carr (2016), resilience may develop when experiencing significant adverse events, with research indicating that the majority of these events occur in the family of origin. Furthermore, Anda et al. (in Carr, 2016) found that almost 75% of adults aged 18-54 years had experienced some form of significant adverse event, with 64% reporting the adverse experience occurring in the family before the age of 18.

Walsh (2016) identified belief systems, organizational patterns, and communication processes as three crucial processes in building family resilience. Communication is crucial since it serves as a channel for conveying any family issues or events. The family's communication style can significantly impact the individual's ability to handle stress-inducing events. The family can teach children how to manage their emotions, cope with stress, and adapt to challenges through their communication style (Carr, 2016). Families have the opportunities for frequent communication, allowing for comprehensive and lasting knowledge of each member, thereby enabling them to support each other during times of adversity (Carr, 2016). Conversely, poor communication within the family has a negative impact on children. Acuna and Kataoka (2017) reported that children exposed to stressful events and poor family communication are more susceptible to PTSD symptoms.

The initial assessment using the resilience scale found that 88.9% of research subjects showed scores that were in the category of moderate resilience and 11.1% were in the category of high resilience, indicating that no family showed resilience in the low category. However, the FGD results revealed that almost all families still experienced problems in aspects of family resilience. The problems in each aspect can be summarized as follows:

1. Aspect of the belief system: Many parents have a pessimistic view of their future due to economic limitations.

2. Aspect of organizational patterns: Parents still have not acted according to their roles, where the father and mother have different attitudes when dealing with their children, causing the children to feel closer to the mother. This closeness results in problematic organizational patterns because there is a built-up triangulation, where mothers do not solve problems that occur directly with fathers, but instead divert problems to children.

3. Aspect of communication: Parents try to establish close communication with their children, but most do not yet have the knowledge and skills about parenting according to their child's age and development, especially those in the adolescent phase, which makes parents confused when faced with changes in their children. Communication between husband and wife experiences become obstacles because they feel the lack of attention or adequate response when their partners talk. Children could not express their wishes in the family because of their parents' attitude, who tend to be angry when their children's wishes do not align with theirs. One of the children expressed

fear of talking in the family, for fear of their father getting angry and slamming objects.

The empathic communication training intervention was selected as a means to enhance family resilience. The training module focuses on Gottman's theory of emotional regulation (Theiss, 2018), which emphasizes parental communication as a key determinant of a child's ability to recognize and respond to experiences effectively. Additionally, Baumrind's theory (Theiss, 2018) highlights the importance of parental communication in promoting control and responsiveness and shaping children's emotions and actions.

All parents participating in the training recognize their vital role in helping their children grow into strong individuals who are capable of handling life's challenges. However, many of them lack the knowledge and skills required to develop effective communication patterns that promote family unity. Most parents are also aware of financial problems that may affect their ability to provide their children with education and opportunities for the future. Unfortunately, they face obstacles in communicating this problem with their partners. As the head of the family, the husband may feel defensive and inadequate to meet the demands of his partner. Consequently, parents struggle to build control and responsiveness within the family through effective communication. These challenges can hinder the family's ability to function effectively. In some cases, the wife may form a close relationship with her children that excludes the husband, which can have negative consequences.

Triangulation is a phenomenon that occurs when three individuals form emotional configurations that create walls within the family system (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2015). According to Bowen (Regina, 2011), triangulation arises when the relationship between two individuals is inherently unstable, and when faced with pressure, they automatically try to achieve stability by involving third parties. The third party involved in the emotional triangle may be another person (e.g., a child or another adult), physical objects (e.g., money, houses, pets), substances (e.g., alcohol, food, drugs) or belief systems (e.g., religion, political beliefs). The triangulation pattern observed in this study involves tension between the husband and wife that remains unresolved, leading the wife to involve their children as a sounding board to relieve tension. However, this strategy can inadvertently transfer the tension onto the children without the wife realizing it.

Capuzzi & Stauffer (2015) have reported several studies that demonstrate a positive relationship between triangulation and marital stress, as well as the existence of a triangulation mechanism in parents that increases anxiety or distress in children. Based on these findings, a special forum was held for parents, where psychoeducation was conducted to raise awareness about problems that may arise due to triangulation.

During the third meeting, the participants were given a task to express their feeling through letters, to practice empathic communication in a joint situation full of acceptance. The letters expressing emotions were shared openly between couples and parents, and the facilitator guided the participants to use emphatic expressions and invited them to imagine switching roles with their children/partners. This activity resulted in the most significant change, as one subject reported. Initially, she felt that her husband tended not to notice and pay attention as she spoke, while her husband felt that she was impatient when he spoke. However, after the session on expressing feelings through letters, her husband became more attentive, made eye contact, and responded well to her emotional expressions. The participants felt happier, and their children also sensed a change in their parent's behavior, leading to a more intimate family environment, where the subjects became more open to discussing the problems. Such openness in the family provides a sense of safety for children, knowing that their parents are ready to listen to them.

An adolescent participant, B, who was initially shy and dependent on his mother, showed a significant change in behavior after his mother improved her communication skills. The mother, Mrs. S realized that her communication style lacked empathy towards her son after reading the letter she wrote to him. She changed the way she communicated with her son, becoming more attentive and supportive, and stopped complaining about B's behavior. As a result, B became more confident and independent, participating in activities outside the home without his mother's company. The meta-analysis by Leijen et al. (Masten, 2018) supports the findings in Mrs. S's family that praise and positive parenting are beneficial for children's behavior development.

Another change was observed in Mrs. E's ability to manage her emotions. Previously, she expressed irritation when her child did not behave as expected. Mrs. E's attitude changed after hearing her

child's letter. Mrs. E's child did not express her desire to take English lessons for fear of burdening her parents. The child was also afraid when parents get angry or annoyed. After listening to the letter, Mrs. E and her husband were able to understand their child's feelings when they show annoyance.

Mrs. E learned to control her irritation, by practicing relaxation, taking a deep breath and looking for words that were more acceptable to her child, and speaking with a low intonation. These changes in Mrs. E's behavior align with Gottman's theory of emotional regulation (Theiss, 2018), which emphasizes the importance of parental communication in shaping a child's ability to recognize and respond to emotions effectively. Mrs. E's improved communication skills facilitated her children's obedience, and her husband also became more caring and enthusiastic in listening to family stories and resolving differences of opinion.

Enhancing the quality of communication between parents extends to the communication process within the family through parenting and plays a vital role in children's resilience. According to Masten (2018), parents play numerous roles in families to foster resilience in children and the entire family system. Therefore, the resilience of parenting adults in families becomes crucial to the well-being of children and the family system. This claim is supported by Bethell, Gombojav, and Whitaker (2019) who conducted a study on children exposed to various adversities and found that parental resilience was linked to the flourishing of children.

The study results suggest that changes in one family member can impact other members, indicating cohesiveness in the family. Cohesion refers to the emotional bonds among family members and the level of individual autonomy experienced by members of the family system (Bruhn, 2009). Thus, the family approach used in this study is more appropriate for increasing family resilience. Lewis and his colleagues (Bruhn, 2009) observed 33 families that were psychologically healthy to identify what distinguishes them from families with psychological problems. The study found that troubled families used an individual approach that only highlighted the problems of individual family members. In contrast, healthy families used a systematic approach that emphasized expressing family strength and seeing it in a broader context. In a healthy family, a threat is not seen as an individual problem but as a family problem.

The ability to express feelings and thoughts also impacts the family organizational structure, which becomes more flexible. Both parents and children can express themselves more easily without fear of being criticized, which leads to greater understanding among family members, closer relationships, and reduced tension. Flexibility is essential because families constantly face changes from experiences of their members as well as external influences. According to Hess & Handel (in Bruhn, 2009), life in the family is an ongoing process that requires mutual understanding. Transactions between family members are necessary to maintain cohesiveness, adaptability, and develop a collective identity. Research shows that communication may lead to greater empathy and understanding from other family members, as suggested by Liermann and Norton (2016).

The first meeting of the FGD revealed that some adult participants expressed pessimism when discussing their family problems, mainly stemming from financial issues and a lack of togetherness in dealing with these problems, thus burdening their partners. Children participants were also hesitant to express their wishes to avoid burdening their parents. The opportunity for open expression helped participants understand that similarities exist between all family members, and they need to take care of each other's feelings. However, they often felt pressured because they could not express their feelings and thoughts freely, fearing that they might hurt others.

Through the process, a new understanding emerged that differences of opinion among family members do not necessarily lead to conflicts, but rather they present an opportunity to understand each other better through open communication. This understanding increased the participants' optimism that they can overcome obstacles together, even though the family's financial condition may not change. These findings are consistent with Black et al.'s (2014) assertion that meaning-making is a crucial part of family bonding and an integral aspect of a family's belief systems. Moreover, Isaacs et al. (2017) supported the belief system as the most potent factor in family resilience, manifested in family spirituality and the ability to ascribe meaning to adversity.

The training process was designed for both parents and children to follow without causing adverse effects. However, despite the efforts, there some weaknesses in the study. One of the weaknesses was related to the results of the pre-test with a resilience scale, which showed that most of the

participants had moderate levels of resilience. In contrast, the FGD results showed that almost all of the participants had difficulties in overcoming their family problems. The author suggests that this could be due to the difficulty of revealing real family conditions through the scale or the limited understanding of participants about the contents of the scale. These findings were supported by Walsh (2016) who stated that family scales and typologies tend to be static and acontextual, providing a snapshot of interaction patterns but often not relating them to a family's stressors, resources, and challenges over time and in their social environment. Another weakness of the study was that not all participants could participate in all sessions in full, so there may be variations in changes experienced by the subjects.

Conclusion

Empathic communication training could significantly improve family resilience in residents of Kulon Progo district in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. The results suggest that this training could be recommended as an alternative approach to promoting resilience in families. The research subjects reported benefiting from the empathic communication training.

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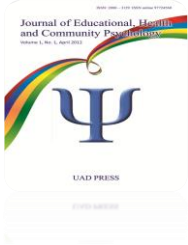
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