



Communication Distortion between Mothers and Adult Children in a Cross-Cultural Counseling Perspective: Analysis of the Transactional Counseling Model on Solitary Behavior in the Elderly

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Abstract. This study aims to describe communication distortions between mothers and adult children from a cross-cultural counseling perspective and to analyze solitary behavior in the elderly based on the Transactional Counseling model. This study used a qualitative method with a case study approach on a 72-year-old woman with the initials S who experienced a prolonged conflict with her daughter. Data were obtained through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, then analyzed descriptively through data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results indicate that family conflict occurs due to communication misunderstandings influenced by generational differences, the child's emotional state, one-way communication patterns, and family cultural values that emphasize advice and harmony. This communication distortion results in a strained mother-child relationship, decreased interaction with grandchildren, and the emergence of solitary behavior, loneliness, and emotional distress in the client. Based on the Transactional Counseling analysis, the imbalance of the Parent, Adult, and Child ego states in family interactions is a significant factor that exacerbates the conflict. Therefore, cross-cultural counseling with a neutral, empathetic approach oriented toward understanding the meaning of communication is essential to help restore family relationships and the psychological well-being of the elderly.

Keywords: Communication Distortion; Cross-Cultural Counseling; Elderly Isolation Behavior; Family Conflict; Transactional Counseling.

1. BACKGROUND

Humans as social creatures cannot be separated from interactions with other people in everyday life (Fajriah et al., 2024). In the interaction process, each individual brings a different cultural background, values, norms, habits, language, and communication patterns (Zakiyah et al., 2022). Cultural differences influence how a person understands problems, expresses opinions, and responds to the behavior of others, often leading to misunderstandings in social and family relationships (Yuliana, 2020). Therefore, culture has an important role in shaping individual behavior and the dynamics of social relations in society (Nurhafiza et al., 2024). In this context, cross-cultural counseling is an important approach because it helps counselors understand the client's cultural characteristics so that the support process can be effective, empathetic, and free from prejudice. Cross-cultural counseling emphasizes the importance of understanding the client's values, norms, and perspectives in interpreting the problems they face, so that counseling services can be tailored to the individual's needs appropriately (Kurniawati & Sa'adah, 2022).

In Indonesia, family culture is still highly valued, and relationships between family members are generally built on love, respect, care, and togetherness. However, conflicts often arise in family life, influenced by differences in thinking, communication patterns, emotional states, and differing interpretations of a problem (Fajar et al., 2021). Ongoing family conflict can impact social relationships and the psychological well-being of family members, especially the elderly, who need emotional attention and harmonious relationships with their children and grandchildren. Elderly individuals tend to desire respect, attention, and emotional closeness with their families. When conflict occurs, they can experience sadness, loneliness, disappointment, and even a loss of peace, which can impact their psychological health and social interactions (Nurpajriah et al., 2025). Research shows that conflict in elderly families is often influenced by ineffective communication, differences of opinion, and the family's low ability to resolve problems adaptively (Ansar et al., 2024).

This phenomenon was seen in the case of an elderly woman with the initials S who experienced a prolonged conflict with her daughter due to a misunderstanding of communication. The conflict began when S gave advice regarding her daughter's household life, but the advice was interpreted differently, causing offense and a strained relationship between mother and daughter. The impact of the conflict was not only felt by S, but also affected her relationship with her grandchildren and other family members. The prolonged conflict caused S to experience emotional stress in the form of sadness, loneliness, and disappointment because she felt unappreciated by her family. This condition shows that differences in perspective and communication within the family can develop into a larger conflict if not resolved properly. Research on family conflict explains that poor communication and an inability to understand the emotional state of family members can increase conflict and affect family harmony (Suhartiwi et al., 2019).

The urgency of this research lies in the importance of understanding family conflicts in the elderly from a cultural and psychological perspective so that the problem-solving process focuses not only on visible behavior but also on cultural values that influence how individuals think and communicate. A cross-cultural counseling approach is relevant because it helps counselors understand the cultural background of their clients, allowing the counseling process to be conducted more wisely, empathetically, and humanely. Furthermore, this research is important because family conflicts experienced by the elderly are often overlooked, even though their impact can affect the mental health, emotional well-being, and quality of social relationships within the family. Family counseling that takes into account Indonesian cultural

values such as family values, respect for parents, and deliberation can be an effective strategy in rebuilding harmonious relationships within the family (Syam et al., 2025).

The research gap in this study is evident in the limited number of studies specifically addressing family conflict in the elderly using a cross-cultural counseling approach in Indonesia. Most previous studies have focused more on general family conflict, family communication, or family counseling without emphasizing the cultural aspects and psychological conditions of the elderly as the primary counselees. Furthermore, research related to cross-cultural counseling generally focuses on multicultural communities or adolescents, while studies on the application of this approach to addressing family conflict in the elderly are still very limited. Therefore, this study is expected to provide new contributions to the development of cross-cultural counseling services, particularly in helping the elderly face family conflict more effectively in accordance with Indonesian cultural values. This study aims to describe communication distortions between mothers and adult children from a cross-cultural counseling perspective and analyze solitary behavior in the elderly based on the Transactional Counseling model.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed an experimental research method. The experimental research method is the most appropriate approach for examining causal relationships and is the most widely used method in scientific development efforts. The experimental research method is considered a standard benchmark because it is objective and precise in addressing hypotheses. This method aims to examine the effect of the independent variable or manipulated variable on the outcome to be measured. Through this approach, the researcher sought to test the effect of cross-cultural counseling interventions on changes in communication conflict between mothers and adult children. A quasi-experimental design in the form of a pretest-posttest control group design was applied to present a systematic overview of the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable, without providing any special treatment outside the designed intervention. (Janitra, 2024)

The research was conducted in the residence of the research subject. This location was chosen because it is the primary setting where the communication conflict between the mother and adult child, which is the focus of the study, occurs. The data sources consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly from a 72-year-old woman with the initials S through measurement using a family communication conflict scale and observation

of her daily social interactions. Secondary data were obtained from books, scientific journals, research articles, and other relevant documents to strengthen and complement the findings for a more comprehensive understanding.

Subjects were selected using purposive sampling, which is the selection of subjects based on certain criteria deemed to be experiencing prolonged communication conflict with an adult child. The subjects were then randomly divided into an experimental group that received cross-cultural counseling interventions for several sessions, and a control group that did not receive treatment. Data collection techniques included administering a pretest to measure initial conditions, providing the intervention to the experimental group, and a posttest to observe changes after the treatment. Data analysis was conducted using inferential statistics with an independent sample t-test and a paired sample t-test after meeting the prerequisite tests of normality and homogeneity. This method is able to control confounding variables that affect the final results of the study, thereby minimizing bias and ambiguity in drawing research conclusions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Communication Distortion between Mothers and Adult Children in a Cross-Cultural Counseling Perspective: Analysis of the Transactional Counseling Model on Solitary Behavior in the Elderly

A 72-year-old divorced woman, S, lives alone in her house and manages a boarding house for male students. She has three children, two sons and one daughter. The problem began with a conflict with her daughter. According to local culture, married daughters live with their parents, so S's daughter previously lived with S, her husband, and their children. For the past five years, S's daughter has experienced domestic conflict due to her husband's infidelity. When S advised her daughter not to blame her husband alone but to engage in self-reflection, the advice offended her daughter. Since then, S's daughter has left the house and cut off communication, not even greeting her mother when they meet in public. Attempts to resolve the matter through the extended family have been unsuccessful, although her daughter-in-law occasionally visits on occasion. This conflict has also impacted S's relationship with her grandchildren; some are not allowed to visit, others have limited communication, and one of S's sons has sided with his sister.

Analysis shows that the problem stems not from a single communication event, but from the interaction of various psychological, social, and relational factors within the family.

There is a mismatch between the parents' communication style, which tends to provide advice and direction, and the children's emotional needs, which at that time require empathy, affirmation, and active listening. This mismatch creates communication distortion, so that messages intended as expressions of concern are perceived negatively, damaging the emotional connection and developing into a rejection of communication. The situation is exacerbated by a lack of clarification after the conflict, an absence of open dialogue, and unresolved negative emotions.

Factors that influence the emergence of problems include one-way family communication patterns, children's emotional conditions that are under pressure so they easily misinterpret messages, parenting patterns that provide direct solutions without adjusting to the child's psychological condition, generational differences in dealing with problems and expressing emotions, family emotional ties that are not yet open, and the absence of further clarification after the conflict. Based on this analysis, the main problems that arise are communication distortion, emotional conflict, rejection of communication, emotional gaps, loneliness and social alienation, the widespread impact of conflict on other family relationships, and prolonged psychological burdens.

From a humanitarian perspective, S experienced sadness, loss of emotional closeness, mental stress, disappointment, and loneliness in his individuality. In his social dimension, he experienced strained relationships, limited interaction, ineffective communication, and reduced social support within the family. His morality was disrupted by misunderstandings in communication ethics, misinterpretation of advice, decreased mutual respect, and a lack of openness. Meanwhile, in his religious dimension, the conflict affected his inner peace, causing anxiety, diminishing his sense of peace, and disrupting S's spiritual well-being.

Analysis of Indonesian Culturally Aware Counseling Strategies

A counselor's awareness of culture and values in cross-cultural counseling is the ability to understand that each individual has a different cultural background, values, norms, and perspectives on how to interpret life and solve problems. This awareness is crucial so that counselors do not use personal cultural standards in assessing clients, but rather are able to understand the context of the problem objectively and comprehensively. In general, human behavior is shaped by the surrounding social and cultural environment, so culture influences how individuals think, communicate, and respond to everyday problems. Therefore, cultural understanding is a crucial part of the counseling process to avoid bias. In this regard, counselors need to recognize that each family member has different experiences and values, resulting in different perspectives on problems. These differences in perception often lead to

misunderstandings in communication because messages are not always received with the same meaning, ultimately triggering conflict and misunderstanding due to a lack of shared perceptions. Furthermore, cultural values play a significant role in shaping how individuals perceive situations, behave, respond to problems, and make decisions.

In the case discussed, strong family values create strong emotional bonds among family members, but also result in differing ways of expressing feelings, which often lead to misunderstandings and tension in family relationships. Counselors must also recognize the importance of assessing clients based on their own cultural standards rather than using their own cultural context to ensure the counseling process remains fair and objective. Awareness that communication differences can lead to misunderstandings is also crucial, as generational differences influence how messages are conveyed, often leading to misinterpretation and conflict. In the counseling process, counselors must be neutral and impartial in order to comprehensively understand the problem, maintain objectivity, and maintain the client's trust. The counseling approach must also be adapted to the client's culture, particularly Indonesian family culture, which values harmony and family relationships, to ensure clients feel comfortable and more receptive to the counseling process, leading to more effective problem-solving.

Perspective on cultural differences in cross-cultural counseling is the counselor's ability to understand, accept, and interpret that each individual has a cultural background that influences how they think, behave, communicate, and solve problems. These differences are unavoidable because each individual grows up in an environment with different values, norms, and customs. Counselors are required to understand the cultural context behind their clients' behavior to avoid making erroneous or biased judgments, while also recognizing that cultural differences often lead to misunderstandings, especially in families involving generations and ways of expressing emotions.

An event can be interpreted differently by individuals due to the influence of cultural values, life experiences, and emotional conditions. Therefore, the counselor's task is to maintain an objective attitude and act as a mediator who bridges differences in perception to prevent them from developing into larger misunderstandings. Generational differences also influence how people think and respond to problems due to differences in life experiences and developments. Therefore, counselors need to respect the ways of thinking of each generation and help build a shared understanding so that communication runs smoothly. Similarly, differences in perception in communication occur when messages are not received with the same meaning due to the influence of emotional conditions, culture, and individual

experiences. Therefore, counselors need to help clarify the meaning of communication to prevent repeated misunderstandings. Each individual also has a different way of resolving conflicts according to their experiences and emotional conditions. Therefore, counselors should not impose one resolution method as the only correct one, but rather be neutral and guide so that conflict resolution takes place more healthily and focuses on reconciliation and restoration of family relationships.

The development of strategies and techniques in this counseling uses the Constancy or Transactional Counseling approach, general techniques, and specific techniques applied in an integrated manner according to the client's condition. This approach is used to understand family communication patterns and see how interactions between family members influence conflict, while still being adapted to Indonesian cultural values that emphasize family harmony. The Constancy approach helps counselors understand family communication and interaction patterns and see how thoughts, feelings, and behaviors influence each other in conflict situations. The focus is on analyzing patterns of family communication that are less open, which can lead to misunderstandings and emotional distance, identifying the main sources of conflict, helping clients see problems from various perspectives, understanding that conflict is reciprocal, and maintaining a neutral attitude so that the counseling process is fair and effective. In addition, general techniques are used to build an initial relationship that is safe, comfortable, and full of trust so that clients are open to discussing problems. In this case, the development of general techniques is focused on creating a warm, empathetic, and non-judgmental atmosphere by creating a sense of security so that the client is not stressed when telling stories, building trust by accepting the client without negative judgment, reducing emotional barriers so that the client is calmer, helping the client express feelings openly, and maintaining warm and non-judgmental communication. This is important because the client is in an emotional state due to family conflict, so a gentle approach is needed so that the counseling process can run more effectively.

Cross-Cultural Counseling Ethics

In counseling cases involving families experiencing conflict, cultural differences and communication styles between family members can contribute to misunderstandings, requiring counselors to be neutral and impartial. By understanding cross-cultural counseling ethics, counselors can help each family member understand their own perspectives and recognize that conflict stems not from one party alone, but from interactions between individuals. Therefore, cross-cultural ethics is crucial in handling these cases (Ramli, 2020). Culture plays a significant role in family communication because it influences how family members communicate during

conflict. Culturally influenced differences in communication can lead to misunderstandings and exacerbate conflict, so counselors need to understand culturally-based communication patterns to avoid misjudgments. Furthermore, each family member has different values and habits when dealing with problems, and these differences can trigger conflict if not properly understood. Counselors must be able to bridge these value differences to create shared understanding within the family. Culture also influences how individuals resolve conflict, with some family members being more open and others more withdrawn, leading to an imbalance in communication. Understanding this allows counselors to provide the right approach, making problem-solving more effective (Abdurrahman, 2024).

The learned, inherited, dynamic, and shared nature of culture also needs to be understood in the counseling process. Culture is learned because values, norms, and customs are acquired by individuals through learning from their surroundings. Therefore, differences in the ways family members think and act arise from these different learning processes. Counselors need to recognize that client behavior is the result of social learning, not innate, and should not be immediately judged negatively. Culture is also inherited because values and customs are passed down from generation to generation, which often results in repeated communication patterns and conflict resolution within families.

Understanding this aspect helps counselors identify the root of the problem more precisely. Furthermore, culture is dynamic because it can change over time and with environmental influences. Generational differences within a family often lead to differing perspectives and communication styles, which can trigger conflict. Therefore, the counseling approach must be flexible and adaptable to the client's circumstances. Culture is also a shared asset because it is shared and used by all members of a community, including families, as a guide for interactions. However, differing interpretations of these values can lead to conflict, so counselors need to help unify perceptions during the counseling process (Yuliana, 2020).

The process of cultural socialization within the family, education, and society also influences the emergence of conflict. Family socialization is the first process in which a person learns values, norms, and customs from parents or other family members. Therefore, differences in parenting styles can influence how family members communicate and resolve conflicts, as well as become a source of misunderstandings. Counselors need to understand that clients' behavioral patterns are formed within the family so that the counseling process can be directed to the true root of the problem. Socialization within education through the learning process at school also shapes individuals' attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Therefore,

differences in educational experiences between family members can influence how they view problems and deal with conflict.

Counselors need to consider the client's educational background when determining their approach. Meanwhile, socialization in society occurs through social interactions with those around them, such as friends, neighbors, and the community, which can shape the client's attitudes and behaviors in dealing with conflict and can also reinforce or exacerbate family problems. Understanding the influence of the client's social environment allows for more appropriate and comprehensive counseling solutions (Soerkarto, 2017).

Discussion

Results: The study showed that communication distortions between mothers and adult children are influenced by differences in perspective, emotional state, and family cultural values. In the context of Indonesian family culture, particularly in the relationship between parents and daughters, communication is often based on the advice and life experiences of the parents. However, when children face domestic conflict, the emotional needs that arise are not only for solutions, but also for empathy and emotional support. The mismatch between the intention of the mother's advice and the child's emotional needs causes the message to be perceived as a form of blame, thus triggering prolonged conflict. The impact of this problem is not limited to the mother-child relationship, but extends to other family relationships, such as strained relationships with grandchildren and the emergence of biases from certain family members. Prolonged conflict also causes loneliness, social withdrawal, psychological stress, and disturbances of inner peace in the elderly.

From a cross-cultural counseling perspective, counselors need to understand that each family member has a different background, experiences, values, and communication styles. Therefore, a neutral, non-judgmental attitude and an understanding of the Indonesian cultural context, which values harmony and family relationships, are crucial. Generational differences also influence communication patterns, with parents tending to use advice-based communication, while children require more empathetic and supportive communication. To understand communication patterns and reciprocal interactions between family members, a transactional counseling approach is used. Through this approach, counselors help clients see that conflict is not solely caused by one party, but rather arises from ineffective two-way communication. Counselors also play a role in helping clients understand differences in perception, reduce blame, and develop a more objective understanding of the conflict.

General counseling techniques are used to build a sense of security, trust, and warm communication so that clients are more open in expressing their problems. Meanwhile, specific

techniques are aimed at self-awareness, clarifying feelings, changing perspectives, and positive reinforcement so that clients are able to deal with conflict in a healthier manner. Overall, this case demonstrates that family conflict in the elderly is not only related to communication aspects, but is also influenced by cultural factors, generational differences, parenting styles, and unmet emotional needs. Therefore, cross-cultural counseling is an important approach to help improve family relationships, rebuild healthy communication, and create understanding and harmony within the family.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the case discussion, it can be concluded that cross-cultural counseling emphasizes the importance of understanding the cultural background, communication patterns, and psychological conditions of individuals in dealing with interpersonal relationship problems, because differences in values and communication methods within the family can give rise to misunderstandings that impact on strained social relationships. In this case, misunderstandings in communication between the counselee and her daughter led to prolonged conflict until the breakdown of family communication, so that the counselee experienced solitary behavior, feelings of sadness, loneliness, disappointment, and decreased enthusiasm for carrying out daily activities due to lack of family support. The Transactional Counseling Approach helps understand the dynamics of family communication through the imbalance of the Parent, Adult, and Child ego states in interactions, so that problems are understood as the result of communication disorders and unresolved emotions. Therefore, it is necessary to monitor the emotional condition of the counselee, gradually improve family communication, increase two-way communication patterns to reduce misunderstandings, and strengthen the counselor's competence in cross-cultural counseling so that they are able to understand family dynamics and apply counseling techniques that are appropriate to the conditions of the counselee and the culture of Indonesian society.

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