

## The Implementation of Bowen's Theory in Family Problems

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### Abstract

Family therapy, as an intervention modality, serves as a professional means to address and ameliorate familial challenges through the involvement of trained experts. Within the realm of family therapy theories, Murray Bowen articulated a perspective positing the inseparability of human emotions from the environmental context. The efficacy of Bowen's family therapy approach in mitigating diverse familial issues is notable. The present study employs a systematic methodological approach, specifically relying on a comprehensive literature review derived from a selection of 15 pertinent articles spanning the years 2010 to 2023. Synthesizing findings from the literature, the Bowen theory emerges as an effective framework for addressing a spectrum of familial challenges, encompassing conflicts within couples as well as issues involving children and parents. This research shows that Bowen Theory is effective in solving various families' problems.

**Keywords:** bowen, therapy, family

### Abstrak

Terapi keluarga adalah suatu bentuk intervensi yang dapat dilakukan untuk membantu menyelesaikan permasalahan keluarga dengan bantuan dari ahli atau profesional. Teori dalam terapi keluarga salah satunya diungkapkan oleh Murray Bowen yang berpendapat bahwa emosi manusia tidak dapat dilepaskan dari lingkungan sekitarnya. Pendekatan terapi keluarga Bowen efektif dalam mengatasi berbagai masalah dalam konteks keluarga. Dalam menyusun metode yang digunakan adalah studi pustaka secara spesifik dari berbagai artikel yang sesuai dengan topik sebanyak 15 artikel dengan rentang tahun dari 2010-2023. Kesimpulan yang didapat dari hasil studi pustaka, pendekatan teori bowen efektif dalam pengimplementasian pada masalah keluarga. Jenis masalah yang dapat diselesaikan dengan pendekatan Bowen bervariasi mulai dari konflik pasangan hingga masalah anak dengan orang tua

**Keywords:** bowen, terapi, keluarga

### Article info

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## INTRODUCTION

Family is a place where individuals can experience warmth and support from their closest relatives. Helmawati (2014) asserts that a family serves as the first environment for a child, where they are influenced and educated informally and naturally. However, at times, families encounter problems or conflicts. Counseling services offer specialized assistance in resolving these familial issues through family counseling. Family counseling involves the application of counseling techniques to specific family situations, focusing on issues within the family dynamics and engaging all family members. This aligns with Syofyan (2015), who views family counseling as an effort to assist individuals within the family in developing their potentials or anticipating issues through the family system, aiming for positive behavioral changes that benefit not only the individual but also other family members. Family counseling can also be defined as an endeavor to aid family members through the familial system, enhancing family communication, fostering optimal personal development, and resolving issues based on the willingness and love for the family. In summary, family counseling addresses issues related to family dynamics and engages all family members in the process, driven by the client's willingness and love for their family.

Within family counseling, several theories have been identified or developed by experts. One of these theories is Bowen Family Therapy, developed by Dr. Murray Bowen. Bowen's theory posits that individuals are products of evolution, and human behavior is significantly influenced by similar natural processes. The Bowen Family Therapy contends that the family is an emotional unit and employs a thinking system to describe the complex interactions among its members. Family members essentially share intensely interconnected emotions, influencing each other's thoughts, feelings, and actions. This theory provides a profound understanding of family dynamics and interpersonal interactions. Its main focus lies on the concepts of individual differentiation, family emotional systems, and multigenerational transmission. This theory helps us view the family as a tightly interconnected system, with a simple idea: how one person in the family affects others. Through this lens, we can explore issues and seek solutions collectively. This aligns with the perspective of Reagan et al. (2021), stating that Bowen's theory views the family as an emotional interconnectedness among its members.

This research aims to describe the implementation of Bowen Family Therapy in the context of family counseling. Through in-depth literature analysis, this study is expected to provide a richer understanding of the successes, obstacles, and potential improvements in applying Bowen Family Therapy in family counseling contexts. Bowen Family Therapy has been one of the prominent theory in the field of family therapy. However, some key concepts are not explained further. This research determined to achieve the key concept of Bowen Family Therapy from prior literature. Effectiveness from the theory and what types of family issues also mentioned in this study. Therefore we seek the implementation of Bowen Family Therapy in family issues, is the theory effective to solve it, and what types of family issues arise in the implementation of Bowen Family Therapy.

The study findings are expected to make a positive contribution to the development of family counseling practices and assist family well-being professionals in providing more effective and relevant services. This research gathered 17 articles in total with only 16 selected.



**METHOD**

This literature review was conducted following Adlini (2022), which involved data collection processes. Data collection involved understanding and studying theories found in various relevant literature. The literature review comprised four stages: preparing necessary tools, compiling bibliographies, scheduling time, and reading or noting research materials. Data were collected through searching and gathering information from various sources, including books, journals, and previous research. Subsequently, the gathered information was critically analyzed and adjusted to support the propositions and ideas discussed in the article.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Sixteen relevant article journals published between 2010 and 2023 were examined and presented in the following Table.

**Table 1.**  
 Article Quality

No	Title	Author	Year	RQ 1	RQ2	RQ3	Results
1.	Anxiety explains self-differentiation: Implications for Bowenian approaches to marriage and family therapy. <i>The American Journal of Family Therapy</i> , 49(5), 534-549.	Thomas, Reagan, John Shelley-Tremblay, and Harvey Joanning.	2021	V.	V.	-	V.
2.	Bowenian family therapy untuk meningkatkan self-differentiation pada keluarga dengan kasus poligami. <i>Jurnal Psikologi Islam</i> , 6(2), 51-62.	Fatma, S.	2019	V.	V.	V.	V.
3.	A Comparison of the effectiveness of Bowenian family therapy and acceptance and commitment-based therapy (ACT) on differentiation of mothers with one child. <i>Islamic- Iranian Family Studies Journal</i> , 1(1), 31-44.	Koranian, F., Arefi, M., & Amiri, H.	2022	V.	V.	V.	V.
4.	Treating financial conflict in couples through a Bowenian	Koochel, E., Astle, N. D., &	2020	V.	V.	V.	V.



	lens: Applied financial socialization and communication privacy theories. Contemporary Family Therapy, 42, 77-83.	Markham, M. A					
5.	The impact of counseling on Bowen's differentiation of self. The Family Journal, 26(2), 150-155.	Messina, K. C., Kolbert, J. B., Bundick, M. J., Crothers, L. M., & Strano, D. A.v	2018	V.	V.	-	V.
6.	Examining the Therapeutic Processes Associated With Conservative Christian Parental Acceptance of Their Son or Daughter's Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual Orientation. The Family Journal, 106648071878591	Cavallo, F. J., & Bradley, C	2018	V.	V.	V.	V.
7.	The Role of Differentiation of Self Dimensions in the Anxiety Problems The Family Journal Volume 28, Issue 1, January 2020, Pages 90-97	Jessica Lampis, Stefania Cataudella, Roberta Speziale, and Samara Elat	2020	V.	V.	-	V.
8.	Family-based approach to the child welfare system: an integration of Bowen family theory concepts	Heather M. Thompson, Armeda Stevenson Wojciak & Morgan E. Cooley	2019	V.	V.	V.	V.
9.	Investigating the effectiveness of Bowenian family therapy in boredom and forgiveness of individuals affected by extramarital relationships of the spouse	Reyhaneh Hashempoor Mofassali1, Toozandehjani Hassan2	2016	V.	V.	V.	V.
10.	Addressing systemic racism and	Josiah, N., Shoola, H.,	2023	V.	-	V.	V.



	intergenerational transmission of anxiety using Bowenian family therapy with African American populations: A Discursive paper.	Rodney, T., Arscott, J., Ndzi, M., Bush, A. D., ... & Starks, S.						
11.	An Application of Bowen Family Systems Theory	Judy Haefner, DNP, RN	2014	V.	V.	V.	V.	
12.	An Investigation of the Relationship between Therapeutic Alliance, Differentiation, and Trauma through Bowen's Family System Theory	Lynn M. Reidinger, Suzanne Bartle-Haring, Eugene Folden	2020	V.	-	V.	V.	
13.	How I Do Marital Therapy: A Bowenian Model. group, 42(2), 159-165.	Geller, M.	2018			V.	V.	- V.
14.	Family Therapy for an Adult Child Experiencing Bullying and Game Addiction: An Application of Bowenian and MRI Theories	Jin-Hui Yu1 Tai- Young Park	2016	V.	V.	V.	V.	
15.	Families with multiple problems through a Bowenian lens. Child Welfare	Hurst, N. C., Sawatzky, D. D., & Pare, D. P.	1996	V.	V.	V.	V.	

The analysis results of literature data showed that most of them addressed the research question (RQ1) as listed in the table above. Bowen's family systems theory has implications for family issues. According to Bowen, every individual is inherently linked to the emotions of others around them. Individuals have the ability to detach themselves from negative emotional influences from their environment, a concept known as differentiation. Based on the literature review findings, individuals with good differentiation abilities tend to have low levels of anxiety, as revealed by Reagan et al. (2020). Similar research was also presented by Fatma (2019), indicating that low differentiation is found in families with polygamous father figures. In that study, individuals with low differentiation are more vulnerable to stress because they struggle more in their relationships and adapt to life changes. This aligns with Bowen's basic concept that differentiation is a phenomenon of life and a process shaped and modified in relation to one's family of origin and extended multigenerational family (Titleman, 2014).

Based on the literature we analyzed, most articles mention that Bowen's theory is effective in addressing family issues, as per research question (RQ2). Research



conducted by Koranian (2022) revealed that the Bowen approach in counseling single mothers is more effective compared to commitment-based therapy. Differences between the two therapies include dimensions of emotional rejection, difficulty in behavioral execution, impulse control difficulty, lack of emotional awareness, limited access, and ambiguity. Similar research findings were also presented by Mofassali (2016), stating that the Bowen approach is effective in reducing marital boredom and enhancing family forgiveness by creating positive interpersonal experiences and correcting perceptions related to depression. Family counseling with the Bowen approach consists of 10 intervention steps designed to help clients find solutions. These steps include building rapport, evaluating problems, enhancing differentiation, detriangulation, cognitive and emotional models of relationships, family projection process, person-to-person relationships, boundary formation, termination, and follow-up (Fatma, 2019).

Bowen's theory approach can be utilized in various contexts of family issues. Based on the literature review conducted in accordance with RQ3, the Bowen approach can be applied to issues concerning single mothers, child wellbeing, couples facing financial problems, parental acceptance of LGBTQ-indicated children, unpleasant childhood experiences, families with polygamy, children experiencing bullying, multigenerational trauma in African-American families, and marital boredom. Bowen's approach focuses on the emotional processes occurring among individuals rather than pathological theories (Brown, 1999). If family members lack the capacity to consider their responses to relationship dilemmas but react with anxiety to emotional demands, chronic anxiety conditions may arise. In the process of understanding issues arising within family settings, Bowen developed eight fundamental principles in family therapy: self-differentiation, triangulation, the emotional system of the nuclear family, family projection process, emotional cutoff, multigenerational transmission process, and sibling position.

## CONCLUSION

This literature review concludes that Bowen's theory can be applied to issues within the family setting. Bowen's theory views human emotions as interconnected with others in their environment. The Bowen approach is effective in addressing family issues. According to Bowen's theory, resolving family problems involves increasing self-differentiation or the ability to emotionally detach from surrounding influences. The contexts of family issues that can be addressed with Bowen's Theory vary from marital conflicts to conflicts between children and parents, to traumatic conditions experienced by children. Bowen perceives an issue as an emotional process occurring among individuals.

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