

The Appropriateness of Family Support in Life Crises: A Determinant of Individual Psychological Well-Being and Vulnerability

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ABSTRACT – Life crises represent a universal phenomenon that challenges individuals' adaptive capacities, often resulting in heightened psychological distress. The family serves as a primary source of support; however, the effectiveness of such support is highly contingent upon the congruence between the type of assistance provided and the individual's psychological needs. This review aims to explore how the quality of familial support influences an individual's ability to manage stress, and how misalignment between the form of support and the nature of the crisis may exacerbate psychological vulnerability. Employing a literature review approach, this study analyzes a range of relevant publications. The findings show that appropriately aligned emotional support can enhance emotional regulation, increase perceived control, and reduce the risk of depression and anxiety. On the other hand, unhelpful support, such as overprotection, excessive instruction, or insufficient validation, may increase psychological burden through mechanisms including emotional alienation, internalization of stigma, disrupted emotional regulation, and the emergence of learned helplessness. Mismatched support also gives rise to intrapersonal and interpersonal conflict, impairs physiological functioning, and decreases long-term resilience. Moreover, familial support demonstrates dual potential, it can serve as either a protective or maladaptive factor, depending on how suitable the support is. This review underscores the critical importance of a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of family support in the context of life crises. Familial sensitivity to emotional needs and variations in crisis types constitutes a crucial component in safeguarding individual psychological well-being.

Keywords: family support, stress, life crisis, mental health, resilience, emotion regulation, psychological vulnerability.

A. INTRODUCTION

Stress and life crises are universal phenomena experienced by humans at various stages of life, whether it is in personal or social domains. Psychological pressure may arise from significant life changes such as job loss, divorce, bereavement, or severe health problems. Numerous studies indicate that prolonged stress can trigger psychosomatic disorders, diminished cognitive functioning, and immunological disturbances (Thoits, 2010). These affirm the necessity for every individual to have sustained support systems to maintain emotional balance and mental resilience (Evedi et al., 2025).

In contemporary society, escalating social, economic, and professional demands increase individual vulnerability to psychosocial crises (Ozkaya, 2022). Life's growing complexity heightens the risk of emotional instability, particularly when personal resources are limited. Psychological assets such as optimism, self-control, and resilience are frequently tested in high-pressure situations, and in the absence of external support, individuals may experience considerable emotional exhaustion (Ozbay et al., 2007). Therefore, the presence of protective interpersonal factors becomes crucial.

Since the early twenty-first century, social psychology has highlighted the importance of emotional, informational, and instrumental support in alleviating stress caused by life crises. Such forms of support function as protective mechanisms that decrease perceived threat levels. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) emphasize that the manner in which individuals appraise and manage stress is profoundly influenced by the surrounding social network, underscoring the inseparability of interpersonal and social

variables from psychological adaptation processes. Broadly defined, social support may originate from spouses, friends, coworkers, or the wider community. However, the closest and most consistent form of support is typically derived from the family unit. Cross-cultural studies have established that family bonds frequently constitute the first line of defense when individuals encounter significant psychological burdens (Taylor, 2012). Thus, internal family dynamics possess strategic potential to reduce perceived stress and augment adaptive capacity.

The family unit offers a unique contribution due to its permanence and its foundation in both emotional and biological dimensions. This bond generates a distinct interconnectedness, fundamentally different from that of external social networks. Empirical research indicates that emotional support from the nuclear family can attenuate the progression of post-traumatic depressive symptoms (Kawachi, 2001). This finding suggests that, particularly in times of crisis, the family serves as an emotional regulation system that plays a critical role in maintaining an individual's psychological stability.

Beyond the emotional aspect, the instrumental dimension of the family has also been demonstrated to be significant. For example, the availability of practical support from family members contributes to the reduction of cognitive burdens when individuals confront stressful situations. Assistance in the form of financial resources, logistical support, or help with everyday problem-solving can alleviate mental exhaustion and accelerate psychological recovery (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Thus, the family becomes an essential agent in optimizing individual coping mechanisms.

A primary challenge lies in the uneven quality of family support received by individuals. Not all family members are able to provide consistent emotional support, leaving individuals at risk of experiencing chronic stress. In certain cases, family relationships may even function as an additional source of stress due to internal conflicts, misunderstandings, or a lack of healthy communication (Umberson & Montez, 2010). This scenario exposes the paradoxical nature of the family: it can serve simultaneously as a psychological resource and as a source of psychological burden.

Another prevailing issue is the limited scope of studies dissecting the complex dynamics between types of family support and the diverse crises encountered throughout life. For instance, the

type of support effective in addressing stress resulting from job loss may not be relevant to crises induced by terminal illness. A mismatch between the type of support provided and the individual's needs may result in frustration and aggravate psychological conditions (Taylor et al., 2007). This underscores the existing gaps in understanding the effectiveness of family support across diverse dimensions of life.

This phenomenon warrants close attention due to its implications for the broader sphere of public mental health. Unmanaged stress levels can contribute to the escalating incidence of psychological disorders, thereby placing additional strain on public health systems. According to the World Health Organization (2022), the prevalence of anxiety and depressive disorders has risen sharply in the post-pandemic era, and the quality of family support is believed to influence both individual vulnerability and recovery rates.

An additional imperative is the need to identify which forms of family support are most appropriate across various life stages and crisis types. Should a comprehensive mapping of these relationships be achieved, it would open avenues for strengthening family-based social interventions. Consequently, the examination of family support mechanisms represents both an academic and practical priority in efforts to alleviate the psychosocial burdens experienced by society (Thoits, 2010).

The primary objective of this study is to elucidate the extent to which the quality of familial support contributes to strengthening individuals' capacity to manage stress arising during life crises. Furthermore, this analysis aims to identify how discrepancies between the forms of family support and individual needs may engender additional psychological burdens, thereby exacerbating mental health conditions in crisis situations.

B. METHOD

This study adopts a literature review approach, emphasizing comprehensive analysis of scholarly sources. The initial stage involved systematic searches of major electronic databases such as Google Scholar, Web of Science, and Scopus to identify relevant articles. The selection process adhered to principles of transparency and incorporated inclusion criteria such as peer-reviewed publications, English language availability, and a focus on familial support in coping with psychosocial

stress. Eligible studies were evaluated based on methodological rigor and the clarity of reported findings (Grant & Booth, 2009).

A narrative synthesis was carried out on the selected studies using an integrative review framework. This method allows combining data from different research designs to better understand social and psychological issues (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). Each article was reviewed based on its goals, methods, population, and key findings related to family support and stress. This helped map perspectives from multiple disciplines and revealed consistent patterns in how families support individuals during life crises.

To ensure accuracy, the review compared findings across fields like health psychology, family sociology, and public health. This triangulation reduces bias and broadens understanding. Thematic analysis was used to identify common themes, gaps, and important factors across the studies (Thomas & Harden, 2008). The final synthesis offers a solid theoretical base for exploring the quality of family support and its role in stress and life crises.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Quality of Family Support and Individual Resilience in Facing Life Crises

The quality of family support is key to helping individuals stay mentally balanced during life crises. Good family support—whether emotional, informational, or practical—protects people from the harmful effects of stress. According to the buffering hypothesis, support from family reduces how threatening a crisis feels, helping people respond in healthier ways (Lakey & Orehek, 2011). Support quality is not just about how much help is given, but how well it fits the person's needs. For example, someone who loses their job benefits more from emotional support and encouragement than just financial help. This aligns with Cohen's (2004) findings that support should meet a person's emotional needs in stressful times. In this way, high-quality family support helps regulate emotions, ease distress, and build resilience.

The quality of family support not only influences individuals' perceptions of threat but also modulates physiological responses associated with stress. Neuroendocrine studies demonstrate that individuals who consistently receive emotional support from their families

tend to exhibit reduced activation of the sympathetic nervous system and decreased cortisol secretion when confronted with stressful situations (Heinrichs et al., 2003). This indicates that the quality of family support is capable of intervening in the biological pathways related to stress regulation. Furthermore, longitudinal research has shown that long-term emotional support from family exerts a cumulative effect on physical health stability, including a reduction in the risk of cardiovascular diseases, which are frequently precipitated by chronic stress (Uchino, 2006). Open communication within families is key to providing the right kind of support. Honest conversations about emotional needs help individuals feel understood and reduce the risk of mismatched support. Increasing mental health awareness can also help family members recognize distress and respond more effectively. This shift from a one-size-fits-all approach to a more empathetic and flexible one strengthens resilience. In turn, it helps support recovery and long-term well-being.

The quality of family support also plays a significant role in facilitating individuals' adaptive coping mechanisms. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) posit that coping strategies are divided into problem-focused and emotion-focused coping, and the presence of high-quality family support can reinforce the effectiveness of both. For instance, when facing a serious medical diagnosis, informational support from the family assists individuals in formulating practical strategies to access healthcare services, while emotional support enhances acceptance of immutable circumstances. Other research indicates that individuals with substantial family support are more likely to employ proactive, problem-solving coping strategies rather than maladaptive approaches such as avoidance or denial (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). Thus, high-quality family support serves as a determinant factor in the selection of healthy coping strategies, which in turn increases individuals' capacity to endure life crises.

The quality of support people receive from their families also plays a big role in shaping their social and emotional identity, especially during difficult times that demand major changes or adjustments. When individuals receive warm, positive emotional support from their close family members, they are more likely to develop a strong sense of self and higher self-confidence. This helps them become more resilient and

better able to handle stress. On the other hand, when the support is poor—such as when family members are overly critical, emotionally distant, or neglectful—it can increase emotional sensitivity and make it harder for the person to cope with challenges. This kind of negative support can weaken a person's ability to adapt, making them more vulnerable to stress and emotional difficulties.

According to Repetti et al. (2002), patterns of conflicted or inconsistent family interactions can increase the risk of internalizing disorders, including anxiety and depression. This suggests that family support must not only be present, but also possess warm, responsive interpersonal qualities that foster psychological growth. During times of crisis, healthy family interactions facilitate a sense of connectedness, which, according to Deci and Ryan (2000), constitutes a fundamental human need for maintaining psychological well-being. Family support that fulfills this basic need for relatedness has a significant protective effect against emotional distress.

The quality of family support plays an important role in how well people think and process information under stress. Those who feel supported are better able to concentrate, make clear decisions, and avoid negative thinking patterns like all-or-nothing thinking or catastrophizing. Studies show that strong family support is linked to lower amygdala activity during threats, which suggests better control over emotional reactions (Eisenberger et al., 2007). Feeling secure through consistent support also helps the brain's prefrontal cortex regulate emotions more effectively. This shows that family support matters not just emotionally, but also for thinking clearly in stressful situations. In short, strong family support protects against the mental strain that long-term stress can cause.

The dimension of family support quality is also reflected in the family's ability to help individuals derive meaning from personal crises. Meaning-making theory emphasizes that successful stress management often depends on the extent to which a crisis experience can be integrated into a broader life narrative (Park, 2010). The family plays a crucial role in providing this framework of meaning through communication, emotional validation, and constructive reframing of experiences. Studies indicate that individuals who derive positive meaning from family support tend to exhibit

greater levels of hope and demonstrate more rapid psychological recovery (Updegraff et al., 2008). Therefore, the quality of family support should be viewed not only as practical or emotional assistance but also as a cultural and symbolic agent shaping an individual's interpretation of life crises. The process of meaning-making is pivotal in determining whether a crisis is perceived as a threat or as an opportunity for growth (Lee & Han, 2024).

The quality of family support significantly influences individuals' capacities to establish healthy emotional regulation during periods of stress. Developmental studies on emotion underscore the role of the family as "co-regulators," assisting individuals—particularly during early adulthood—in managing negative emotions that arise in response to crises (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Support that is empathetic, warm, and accepting helps people manage negative emotions like anger and anxiety. In contrast, support that is critical or lacking empathy can worsen emotional instability and lead to unhealthy behaviors. Research also shows that those with strong family support are better at using cognitive reappraisal—rethinking stressful situations in a more positive way (Gross & John, 2003). This highlights that family support isn't just about being physically present; the emotional quality of that support plays a major role in how well individuals regulate their emotions during crises (Secor et al., 2017).

The quality of family support can be seen in how well it helps people develop an internal locus of control—the belief that they can influence their own lives. Support that is validating and encouraging helps strengthen this belief, even during crises. This idea fits with self-efficacy theory, which highlights the importance of believing in one's ability to face challenges (Bandura, 2001). People who receive good family support tend to have higher self-efficacy and are more resilient under stress (Benight & Bandura, 2004). On the other hand, poor support can lead to dependency or feelings of helplessness, making stress harder to handle. Therefore, strong family support helps build a sense of control, which is key to adapting well in tough times.

In addition to reinforcing internal control, family support quality is empirically correlated with the quality of individuals' external social relationships. Individuals who experience positive family support typically demonstrate

superior interpersonal skills, enabling them to build more extensive social networks beyond the family's domain. Studies reveal that attachment patterns formed within the family influence the ability to establish healthy social relations, thereby serving as additional resources for stress management (Collins & Feeney, 2004). On the contrary, poor family support quality can foster insecure attachment patterns, resulting in difficulties forming social connections, heightened isolation, and increased psychological burden during crises. Thus, the relevance of family support transcends the intrapersonal level and extends to the broader sphere of social connectedness.

The quality of family support contributes fundamentally to the development of individual resilience. Resilience is understood as the ability to recover after significant adversity. Research demonstrates that individuals who receive high-quality family support display stronger resilience when confronting both personal and collective crises (Masten, 2014). Supportive family environments enable individuals to approach crises not as the termination of life stability but rather as challenges to be surmounted. Conversely, insufficient support heightens the risk of despair and the inability to recover. Therefore, family support quality should be regarded as a foundational element in the formation of sustainable resilience, an attribute vital to maintaining long-term psychological well-being.

Ultimately, the quality of family support is a key factor in helping individuals maintain overall well-being—emotionally, mentally, and physically—during times of stress. Good support not only helps with emotions, thoughts, and bodily responses but also creates a sense of belonging, reminding individuals they are not facing crises alone. Cross-cultural studies show that families offering strong, high-quality support promote a feeling of unity, which reduces the personal burden people feel during difficult times (Kwon, 2013).

These findings emphasize that family support quality is a multifaceted mechanism uniting biological, psychological, social, and cultural dimensions to protect individuals from the destructive consequences of stress. Accordingly, the quality of family support should be regarded as a key factor in understanding the dynamic processes underlying human adaptation to life crises.

Mismatch in Family Support as a Factor Increasing Psychological Vulnerability

A mismatch between the type of family support provided and the specific nature of the crisis faced by an individual can increase psychological vulnerability, as the support offered fails to accommodate actual needs. For instance, when an individual is confronted with a chronic illness that necessitates long-term emotional regulation, practical advice or pressure for rapid recovery may instead result in heightened distress. This scenario is consistent with the person–environment fit model, which asserts that social support is only effective when aligned with the psychosocial needs of the recipient (Cutrona & Russell, 1990).

Support incongruity often leads individuals to feel misunderstood, ultimately provoking loneliness even amidst familial presence. Research has shown that individuals who receive incongruous support report increased symptoms of anxiety and depression due to the discrepancy between expectations and reality (Rafaeli & Gleason, 2009). Thus, the quality of family interaction must not be assessed by the quantity of support provided, but by the degree of alignment between the nature of assistance and the crisis encountered.

A mismatch between the type of family support and individual needs can exacerbate the perception of crisis by increasing feelings of loss of control. Individuals who receive overly directive or overprotective support may experience diminished personal autonomy. This may trigger frustration, reduce self-efficacy, and add to the psychological burden of coping with stress (Coyne et al., 1988). For example, in cases of occupational crisis, excessive financial support that is not accompanied by reinforcement of self-worth may worsen feelings of inadequacy. Studies have shown that overprotection within familial relationships is frequently associated with heightened vulnerability to depression and anxiety, as individuals feel they are not trusted to manage challenges independently (Schwartz et al., 2012). Therefore, support that appears positive on the surface may produce negative effects if not aligned with the recipient's psychological needs.

The incongruence of family support is also associated with the emergence of both intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts, which further intensify the psychological

burden on individuals. When forced to accept forms of support that are irrelevant to their actual needs, individuals may experience ambivalence that serves as an additional stressor.

Gleason et al. (2008) found that misdirected support—such as offering practical solutions when emotional validation is what is needed—may heighten irritability and deteriorate family relationship quality. As a result, individuals are confronted not only with external crises but also with additional conflict within the family system itself. The cumulative effect elevates the risk of psychological dysfunctions, including emotional isolation and social withdrawal. Consequently, failure to tailor support to the specific nature of the crisis has considerable implications for individual mental health.

The phenomenon of mismatched family support also has implications for heightened psychological alienation, wherein individuals feel emotionally unsupported by their closest social environments. In times of crisis, the need for validation and understanding often takes precedence; yet, if the support provided is primarily instructional or corrective, it may be interpreted as negative judgment. For instance, in cases of bereavement, exhortations to move on or refocus one's life are often at odds with the grieving process. This aligns with Bonanno et al. (2002), which highlight that individual adaptation to loss follows a unique pattern, and misaligned emotional support can prolong distress. The sense of estrangement resulting from a gap between expectations and received assistance contributes to more severe depressive symptoms.

Such a mismatch impacts not only immediate emotional responses but may also reshape an individual's perception of family relationship quality over the long term, thereby intensifying psychological vulnerability to future crises. In addition to exacerbating feelings of estrangement, incongruent family support can reinforce perceptions of internalized stigma. Individuals who are facing crises such as mental health challenges or job loss often experience shame and diminished self-worth.

When family support is tinged with criticism or comparison with others, such individuals may perceive it as affirmation of their incapacity. Research by Schomerus et al. (2012) demonstrates that social support mixed with stigmatizing attitudes from close relations

intensifies internalized stigma, which is correlated with increased depressive symptoms and diminished quality of life. These findings illustrate that misguided support does not merely fail to offer protection, but may actively worsen the recipient's psychological condition. Over time, individuals may lose confidence in the family's ability to provide assistance, thereby limiting their openness to future support. This, in turn, heightens the risk of social isolation and deepens psychological vulnerability when confronting crises.

Incongruence of family support also exerts consequences on emotional regulation. Misguided support can disrupt an individual's natural coping strategies, leading to greater emotional disorganization. Butler et al. (2003) found that inaccurate familial responses to emotional needs can impede emotional regulation and escalate physiological reactivity to stress. For instance, excessive encouragement to "bounce back" from job loss—without sufficient time for reflection—can provoke emotional outbursts or feelings of lack of control. Such responses not only increase psychological suffering but also undermine individuals' ability to mobilize internal resources for crisis management. The disruption of emotional regulation elevates the risk of psychological disorders, such as anxiety and depression, thereby amplifying cycles of vulnerability over the long term.

A mismatch in the form of support can also precipitate generational conflict within families. Different generations often harbor divergent orientations and expectations regarding crisis management. Older generations, for instance, may emphasize stoicism and emotional restraint, whereas younger generations may require greater emotional validation and open communication. Greenfield and Marks (2006) suggest that differences in how family members perceive their interactions can increase emotional tension, especially when the support given doesn't match what the person feels they need. In times of crisis, these mismatches can add extra stress and weaken a person's ability to cope. As a result, mismatched support not only increases personal distress but can also create conflict and imbalance within the family as a whole.

Mismatched forms of support also heighten susceptibility to the phenomenon of learned helplessness, where individuals feel incapable

of altering or controlling their circumstances despite receiving assistance. This typically arises when family support emphasizes dependence rather than promoting problem-solving capacity. Seligman (1975) emphasized that learned helplessness is a critical contributor to depression vulnerability. Within the familial context, overbearing or instructive support may diminish personal confidence in crisis resolution. As a result, not only do individuals fail to benefit from such support, but they are also likely to internalize a sense of powerlessness, thereby compounding psychological vulnerability.

Finally, incongruent family support may intensify the physiological effects of ongoing stress. Uchino (2006) found that good social support helps protect the heart and immune system, while poor or mismatched support can raise blood pressure and disrupt stress hormones. This shows that when family support doesn't meet a person's needs, it can harm both mental and physical health. During ongoing crises, these physical effects can build up and make mental health worse through mind-body connections. As a result, poor support can create a harmful cycle, where both emotional and physical problems feed into each other.

Moreover, inappropriate family support is also associated with the phenomenon of emotional ambivalence, wherein individuals perceive support as a combination of both benefit and burden. Fingerman et al. (2004) explain that ambivalence in familial relationships emerges when assistance is accompanied by criticism, demands, or expressions of frustration. In times of crisis, such ambivalence can exacerbate stress, as individuals often feel compelled to accept available support despite its misalignment with their actual needs. This sense of being trapped within the relationship further deteriorates psychological well-being, as individuals lose a secure space to express their vulnerabilities. Consequently, family support, which ideally serves as a protective factor, paradoxically transforms into a source of chronic stress.

In the long run, mismatched family support can weaken a person's ability to cope with future challenges. Receiving the wrong kind of support again and again can lead to negative beliefs about how helpful others really are. This aligns with Lakey and Orehek (2011), who assert that perceived quality of support is a

more decisive predictor of psychological well-being than its quantity. When trust in family support fades, people may withdraw or turn to unhealthy coping methods, like substance use or avoidance. Over time, this makes them more vulnerable and less able to handle future crises.

D. CONCLUSION

This review affirms that the quality and appropriateness of familial support are critical determinants in individuals' processes of adaptation to stress and life crises. Appropriate support, both emotional and instrumental, serves to strengthen individuals' capacities to manage pressure, alleviate negative psychological symptoms, and maintain the stability of interpersonal relationships. Conversely, a lack of congruence between the type of support provided and actual needs not only diminishes its intended benefits but also amplifies vulnerability through heightened feelings of alienation, internalized stigma, emotional disorganization, and relational ambivalence. These processes underscore the dynamic and potentially double-edged nature of family support with respect to psychological well-being.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that families cultivate a deeper understanding of the diversity of crisis forms and their associated emotional needs. Families should develop sensitivity to individual variations in need and avoid support patterns that are excessively controlling or overly prescriptive. By doing so, familial support can be better aligned with the characteristics of the crisis at hand and thus function as an effective protective factor—rather than as an additional psychological burden.

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