

Research Article

Enhancing Interpersonal Communication in Couples With Special Needs Children: An Examination of Behavioral Couple Therapy Interventions

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Abstract.

This case report aims to report the handling of cases of ineffective communication between husband and wife in families who have children with special needs. The problem that arises in this family is the problem of ineffective communication. This problem causes disharmony within the family which has an impact on children with special needs. Participants were husband and wife who had been married for 40 years. The husband works as a casual laborer and the wife is a housewife. The methods used are interviews and observation as an assessment as well as behavioral couple therapy intervention with behavior exchange techniques and communication skills training as an effort to overcome husband–wife communication problems. The results of the intervention showed that previously ineffective communication had changed to become more effective. Changes in communication make husband and wife closer. Wives begin to serve their husbands, such as preparing food and other household needs as well as dividing the tasks of caring for children. Husbands also started to work more diligently, and wanted to eat their wives' cooking which they previously didn't want to do. In conclusion, behavioral couples therapy can overcome the problem of ineffective communication between husband and wife. This finding is interesting because post-covid family problems are still common and can reduce the quality of a couple's relationship.

Keywords: aversive communication, behavioral couple therapy, couple

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1. BACKGROUND

Problems with patterns of communication and interaction within the family are problems that can occur at any time and affect marital satisfaction [1]. Many triggers can cause problems in the family, one of which is the Covid 19 pandemic [2]. Covid 19 menjadi sebuah pandemic yang menyerang seluruh dunia dan berdampak pada semua manusia. Covid 19 is a pandemic that attacks the whole world and affects all humans. The covid pandemic gave rise to many problems in everyday life, from medical illness to death, interaction clashes, the lure system becomes bold and what is worse is the increase in aggression rates [3].

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Job loss is a big problem for family life because it affects the continuity of the family life [4]. Losing jobs to the family can lead to economic problems that will decrease because there is no income coming in during a pandemic [5]. The deteriorating economy due to the pandemic, apart from financial problems, was also found to have an effect on the dynamics of family relationships [6]. Husbands and wives who cannot meet their economic needs are found to lead to stress problems that go unaddressed [7].

Mires et al. found higher problems were found in couples who had children with special needs because they had challenges in providing teaching [8]. Children with special needs have many limitations, so parents must accompany them throughout their lives [9]. During the Covid-19 pandemic, it was found that family problems with children with special needs were increasing [10]. The impact of parents' problems is that children are neglected and not cared for as usual, making it a challenge for families who have children with special needs [11].

Luetke in his research found that couples who experience stress due to a pandemic are very at risk of causing conflict, not only in couples but in the family as a whole [12]. Mushtaque also found that the beginning of conflict in the family can lead to bigger problems, such as suicide, violence and divorce [13]. In Indonesia, Liem found that out of 5,221 volunteers who facilitated Covid-19, 39.9% of them had the desire to hurt themselves and wanted to commit suicide [14]. In addition, Mulyana reported that in Indonesia it was also found that during the pandemic every month cases of domestic violence were found to increase [15].

Thus the problem is worse. Ramdhani & Nurwati also reported that the divorce rate during the Covid pandemic increased due to various problems in the family [16]. The breakdown of family relationships is triggered by the decreasing intimacy and quality of relationships [17]. Beckmeyer found that family relationships with unfavorable conditions at the time of the pandemic were also reported until post-covid also had difficulties and challenges in new life [18]. Heard reports that in post-covid life there are still problems that are still experienced in couples and still require special attention from professionals [19].

Ryan & Quinlan found that in couples who have children with special needs who have communication problems, it is more advisable to resolve the problem by involving professionals. [20]. Beach stated that reinforcement in the form of interventions for couples is still a problem in efforts to repair and solve problems [21]. Couples therapy is one of the interventions that was found to be able to overcome family problems due to the covid pandemic [22]. More specifically, the handling of cases carried out by Heidari can improve and improve family functioning as a whole [23]. The purpose of this case

report is to overcome communication problems between husband and wife which were originally caused by the Covid 19 pandemic. If the problem is not handled, it can lead to bigger problems, and also of course have an impact on the children of couples with special needs. Case handling is carried out using behavioral couple therapy so that more effective communication patterns can be achieved.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1. Variables or concepts studied

Patterns of communication and interaction within the family are the focus of this case study. Communication is a pattern that occurs within the family in the form of verbal and non-verbal communication or interactions that involve behavior as a response. Communication that occurs using words or sentences, voice intonation, expression of feelings that can occur both positively and negatively [24].

2.2. Research subject

Determination of the sample as participants in this case study is based on direct reports from wives who complain about problems in the family that they want to solve. There were two participants in this case study, namely husband and wife, who had agreed to become participants. The husband is 61 years old and the wife is 54 years old, and the marriage age is 40 years. The couple has a child with special needs whose type of disorder is intellectual disability.

2.3. Research Instruments

In this case study, the instrument used is an intervention guideline that serves to provide guidance in the implementation of interventions. The guide contains the stages of behavioral couple therapy intervention which consists of five stages according to Farrell & Fals-Steward [20] as follows:

Stage 1: Provide views on the problems that occur and setting goals and explaining therapy.

Stage 2: Behavioral exchange

Stage 3: Communication skills training and assignment

Stage 4: Evaluation of changes in therapy results and termination.

Stage 5 : Follow-up

The intervention consists of five main stages which in implementation consist of seven sessions.

2.4. Research design

This research is a case study of handling psychological problems in the family with a focus on communication problems. Cases handled are written in the form of a case report. A case report is defined as a description of the clinical signs, symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up of an individual patient with some unusual symptoms and the healing process of interest to the reader or the public, followed by an explanation [25].

2.5. Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedure was carried out in several stages. The first stage is to conduct interviews and observations from participant 1, namely the wife. Then the second stage was carried out by collecting data through interviews and observation of participant 2, namely the husband. Data collection can be done more than once, and if the data can describe and map problems in husbands and wives, then the next step is to formulate intervention targets based on problems and desires between husband and wife for the results of the intervention. Next is the provision of a statement of willingness to be given an intervention in the form of behavioral couple therapy which will be carried out in five stages with an explanation of the duration and frequency until the end of the intervention.

2.6. Data analysis technique

The data analysis used in this case study is based on the assignment given during the intervention. In addition to the results of the intervention assignment, analysis was also carried out through the results of interviews and observations that led to changes in participant behavior. The analysis focuses on improving and changing behavior related to communication and interaction before and after the intervention is given.

3. CASE PRESENTATION AND PROBLEM DYNAMIC

Problems that occur in the family are caused by errors in communication. Turner & West mention that a healthy family is an intimate group that can create and maintain themselves through interactions between family members and other people outside the family [26]. The case of couples in this family can be seen through the behavior approach. Behavior theory views human behavior as being formed due to learning from non-adaptive behavior [27]. The concept of behavior views individual behavior as the result of a learning process and is supported by reinforcement to maintain the behavior that appears [28]. In the concept of negative stimulus and response behavior, it will lead to negative behavior and then become conditioned [29]. The concept of stimulus and response between husband and wife can describe the dynamics of the pattern of relationships that cause problems.

Negative stimuli and negative responses that are repeated can cause conditioned behavior [30]. The relationship between husband and wife that is not good tends to bring up problems in everyday life. McCollum & Banas mentions that poor communication involving thoughts, feelings and actions between partners can lead to conflict in the family [31]. Problems in the family started during the pandemic and the husband was more at home because there was no steady job. The wife begins to feel bored because the husband, who spends more time at home, cannot pay more attention. The concept of stimulus response (S-R) is a causal relationship from a behavior that appears [30]. Skinner said that a stimulus is something that triggers, causes or starts an action [30]. The stimulus issued by the wife is to criticize the husband's current behavior for not giving more attention at home. The purpose of the wife criticizing the husband's behavior is to ask the husband to pay more attention.

Response is a change or reaction that is produced according to the stimulus obtained [32]. Criticism given by the wife makes the husband uncomfortable and responds by criticizing that the wife's request is too much. From the husband's criticism, the wife responds angrily again because her request for attention is considered excessive. Segrin & Flora mention that an unbalanced interaction is an early symptom that will lead to a negative relationship [33]. The husband again responds to the wife's anger by getting angry and opposing the wife's opinion. According to Galvin et al. Negative communication is basically a matter of wrong techniques in listening, reading and speaking, where these errors can lead to acceptance errors to become a particular problem [34].

Husbands who repay their wife's anger with anger, make the wife even more angry. The concept of operant conditioning is a conditioned or accustomed learning process in response to a stimulus [35]. Stimulus from the wife and negative responses from the husband are increasingly conditioned into aversive communication and hurt each other. Negative communication both verbal and non-verbal is increasingly conditioned. Negative verbal communication from husband and wife criticizing and blaming each other. Non-verbal communication from the husband is more silent and does not speak to the wife when in a state of argument. Aversive communication in partners has an impact on relationships. The impact experienced was the emergence of quarrels, mutual silence, did not greet each other and looked away. Galvin et al. mentioned that negative verbal and non-verbal communication can make it difficult for couples to solve problems and make decisions [34].

The observation results also show that when sitting together there is also no communication that occurs and they are silent to each other. Besides that, when they pass each other, they don't look at each other and look away from each other. Turner & West stated that negative interaction patterns will not create and maintain relationships between partners [26]. Husband and wife are mutually aversive in response. Avoidance of mutual silence after problems between partners has negative relationship outcomes, especially if the topic of conflict is heavy or if expectations in the family involve talking about problems and disagreements [36]. From communication problems and the negative impacts that arise then make negative judgments or negative attributions for the behavior between husband and wife. Attributions/assessments related to attitudes, thoughts and behavior indicate a negative description between one another [34].

Husbands judge that wives tend to be excessive in their behavior, especially when asking husbands to change to be more attentive so that they perceive the wife's behavior as negative. Meanwhile, the wife also considers the husband to be less able to give attention as a husband to his wife, so the wife describes the husband negatively. From these negative attributions, both of them feel dissatisfied with their current relationship and do not respect each other for everything that husband and wife have given. It can be concluded that the problems that occur between husband and wife are ineffective communication patterns. A summary of the dynamics of problem formation can be seen in chart 1.

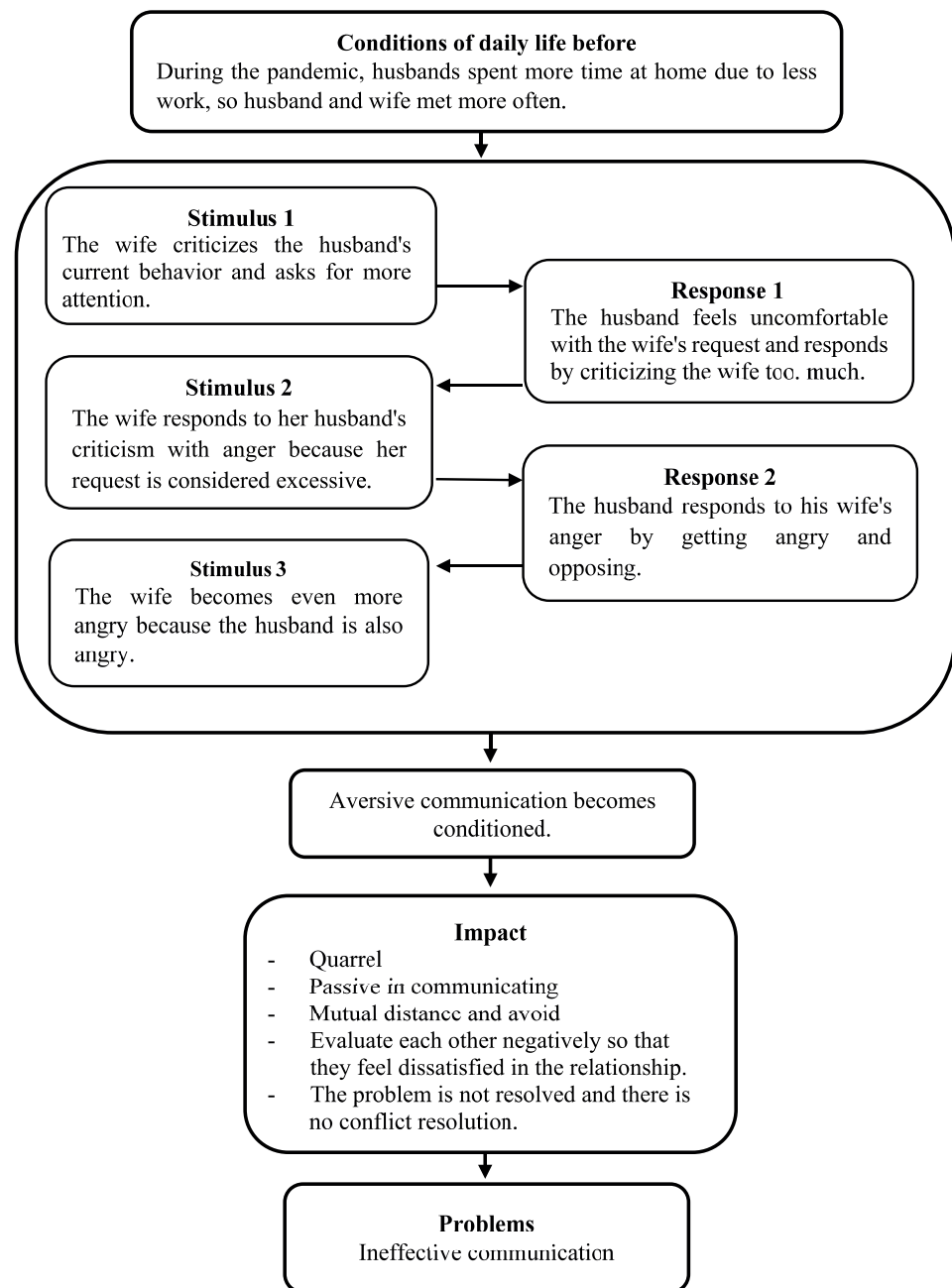


Figure 1: The dynamics of problem formation.

4. RESULT

The results of behavioral couples therapy interventions to overcome ineffective communication problems indicate changes in communication that are more effective in husband and wife couples. Change occurs gradually in each behavioral couple therapy session that is followed by a good partner. Effective communication changes can be achieved by couples because they go through the stages of intervention from the first session to the last. In the first session, namely explaining the problems that occur

according to the results of the interviews, it can bring insight to husbands and wives about the behavior that must be changed. Husband and wife can give clarification to each other about events that make family relations not good. Husbands can convey their annoyance over the behavior of their wives and wives can convey their anxieties over their husbands' behavior. Husband and wife can agree to solve the problem and are willing to attend the therapy session until it is finished.

In the behavior exchange session, husbands and wives were asked to change their previously negative behavior to be more positive. Husband and wife in this session can make a list of adaptive behaviors for each to do as an effort to improve behavior. The positive behavior carried out is in accordance with the desired behavior of the couple based on the previous session during the problem presentation and clarification session between husband and wife. The predetermined behavior is written on a piece of paper to be a guide between husband and wife in interacting. The list of these behaviors can be seen in table 1. List of the following behaviors:

TABLE 1: List of couples' behavior formulations.

Behavior list	
Wife	Husband
Pay more attention to your husband by preparing all your husband's needs, such as eating and others.	Be more attentive, by talking to your wife and be more intimate in your behavior at home.
Respect by not speaking in a high tone when talking to your husband.	Spend more time with wife and children.
Spend time with your husband by talking to each other and discussing your husband's needs or daily life.	Appreciating what the wife gives is like eating at home and the attention that has been given by the wife is like saying goodbye when leaving the house.
Appreciate by asking and greeting when the husband comes and goes.	Responding to all communication or wife's behavior with positive behavior and communication.
Carry out congregational prayers	Carry out congregational prayers
Give praise to your husband for the small and big things that have been done.	Fulfilling household needs such as taking groceries or other outside needs and helping the wife with the housework.
increase intimacy by sleeping in a room with your husband, massaging your husband when he is tired.	Give news when outside the home such as if you come home late or something else is happening.

Even these behaviors can be carried out by husbands and wives properly. Maximum changes according to the list of behaviors can be made after two sessions. In the first session after carrying out their duties, the wife said that her husband had not been optimal in changing behavior. The husband conveyed that the obstacle to changing behavior was because there was still a feeling of awkwardness because he was not

used to it. After being given an evaluation regarding behavior that has not changed optimally, then given the same task to be carried out for seven days. After doing their job, the wife said that her husband's changes were good according to the specified behavior list. Likewise, the husband also said that the wife's change had also been good. From the results of behavior that can change to be more positive, making the target of changing interactions to be positive is achieved. The changes obtained from the husband-wife exchange behavior sessions were no longer aversive in interaction so that positive responses began to form.

Simultaneously with the assignment of behavior exchange to the target of communication training skills is to change ineffective communication to be more effective and negative interactions to be positive. In the communication skill training session, husband and wife can follow and understand well. Husbands and wives are given explanations and examples of how to communicate well, the skills provided are verbal and non-verbal communication. During the role play session, the husband and wife can participate according to the abilities taught. The role play that was carried out discussed the problems related to the wife who asked to pay more attention to the relationship and pay more attention. The results of the role play session are that the husband can understand the wishes of the wife and the wife can convey her wishes properly, so that the essence of the problem can be resolved from the start. Based on the increase in communication skills that can already be seen in the role play session, the target of understanding communication techniques in pairs can be achieved. Then the target looks more increased when finished carrying out communication tasks in one week. The abilities that husbands and wives can master in communicating, as seen from the role play sessions and the assignments given can be seen in table 2. Changes in communication skills before and after the intervention..

In the task implementation session, the husband and wife can carry out the task well for one week. Husband and wife have used the communication skills taught in the previous session to solve the problem. Problem solving that has been done includes sharing in caring for children including taking time to help study and taking children to therapy. Apart from that, it is related to taking the time to chat together every day. The communication skills currently mastered by the couple have reached the target of previously negative communication such as criticizing and not giving opportunities to be more positive by listening to each other, giving opportunities and not criticizing each other. The change from communication skill training is that husbands and wives who previously communicated ineffectively changed to become more effective and solutive.

Changes in communication patterns that were previously negative to positive also make the interaction between husband and wife more positive. Previously husband and wife responded to each other's statements with negative things. The response is like a high tone that is responded to in a high tone which causes quarrels and scolds one another. After the session the husband and wife can achieve more positive interactions by responding positively to the partner's statements such as listening to each other and resolving conflicts through resolution so that there are no fights and scolding each other. The abilities that husbands and wives can master in communicating, as seen from the role play sessions and the assignments given can be seen in tables 2 and 3. Changes in communication skills before and after the intervention.

TABLE 2: Changes in verbal communication skills before and after the intervention.

Before Intervention	After Intervention
Communicate with words that knock each other out or offend	Can communicate without offensive words
Interrupting each other when arguing.	Give each other a chance to talk.
Speaking in a high pitched voice.	Can speak softly and more comfortable to hear.
Criticize and oppose each other.	Can show sympathy and empathy
Doesn't solve the problem.	Can solve conflict resolution by discussing or choosing one of the many alternative solutions to the problem.

TABLE 3: Changes in non-verbal communication skills before and after the intervention.

Before Intervention	After Intervention
Shows a somber face when talking.	Positive facial expressions (smile, laugh, cheer)
Do not face each other and underestimate when communicating.	Body gestures (straight, facing)
Always give a sharp stare when communicating with angry feelings	Able to maintain good eye contact when solving problems.
Unable to demonstrate understanding of the opinions given.	Can provide understanding with a nod or shake when telling each other to solve problems.
Reproach each other and do not want to listen.	Can listen in full or active listen.

For changes in patterns of positive interaction and communication, it will have an impact on changes in attribution. Attributions that previously assessed each other negatively towards the behavior of husbands and wives, are now able to give each other positive evaluations of behavior and communication which are currently subject to change. A recap of behavior changes from before and the termination session can be seen in table 4. Changes in the overall results of the intervention:

TABLE 4: Overall change in intervention results.

Pre Intervention	Post Intervention
Patterns of ineffective communication with each other criticizing, opposing and angry every day.	Can communicate effectively, both verbally and non-verbally, such as listening to each other, giving opportunities and conveying them well.
There are frequent fights and then silence and mutual avoidance and negative evaluation of each other.	Being able to discuss problems or conflict resolution well so that there are no fights and changes in the way of communication and behavior make partners able to evaluate each other positively and feel satisfied in the relationship.
Behavior: Not affectionate and caring Husband does not eat at home Husband never says goodbye Rarely take the time Wife rarely prepares meals Don't want to sleep in the same room	Behavior: Can be affectionate and caring Husband wants to eat at home Husband goes to say goodbye Can spend time with each other Wife prepares food at home Husband and wife sleep in one room

5. DISCUSSION

The behavioral couples therapy intervention provided was able to overcome previously ineffective communication to become more effective. The findings in this case report can strengthen previous research which found that communication problems in families with children with special needs can be resolved with behavioral couple therapy. Problems that exist in the family occur because of negative ways of communicating. The interventions provided are able to change family relationships in accordance with the objectives of behavioral couples therapy. The first goal is to increase positive partner activity, increase positive feelings, goodwill and commitment to the relationship; the second goal is to improve the ability of communication skills that help couples resolve conflicts, problems and changes in relationships [37]. Changes in aspects of husband and wife communication that were previously ineffective such as opposing and criticizing become more effective by being able to listen and convey well. Rajaei et al. found that providing effective communication skills within the family is the key to a positive or harmonious relationship [38].

The techniques that have been given to couples are also able to resolve the root causes of disagreements that cause problems. Cornelius et al. found that communication skill training not only provides skills in communicating opinions, but couples are able to solve problems through conflict resolution with good communication [39]. Changes that occur apart from communication are the formation of positive patterns of interaction between husband and wife. Interactions that previously responded to

each other negatively, such as responding to each other with anger, can change to be more positive with more acceptable responses. Tavakolizadeh et al. found that in communication skills training techniques can also overcome problems related to emotions in relationships, or negative emotions in response to partners. The emotions experienced by the partner as a negative response can be changed into a more positive response by providing the opportunity to speak and listen carefully to what the partner is saying so that anger and fights do not arise.

Christensen et al. found that by giving behavioral couples therapy, emotional reactions or negative responses from interactions that cause problems in communication are found to be overcome by couples in the long term [40]. In communication skill training couples who can maintain communication skills, the quality of the relationship or satisfaction in the relationship is found to increase [41]. Changes in more effective communication and more positive behavior from behavior exchange as well as reduced negative impacts such as avoiding each other, distancing and fighting make the assessment between husband and wife more positive and relationship satisfaction gradually increases. Hrapczynski et al. found the importance of changing behavior to be positive because by changing this, the assessment in describing a partner negatively becomes more positive and increases satisfaction in the relationship [42]. Based on the behavioral couples therapy intervention given to couples, it is effective in dealing with ineffective communication problems and has a positive impact on communication, behavior and attribution.

6. CONCLUSION

Behavioral couples therapy is effective in overcoming the problem of ineffective communication in husbands and wives to be more effective. Previously ineffective communication such as criticizing and opposing each other became more effective by giving each other opportunities, listening and giving opportunities. These changes can be achieved because the husband and wife can master the ability to communicate properly according to what is taught in the communication skill training session. Husband and wife can communicate verbally and non-verbally well. Behavior exchange also simultaneously provides changes in the behavior desired by partners such as more attention, mutual respect and respect. Negative impacts such as fighting, mutual avoidance and negative mutual judgments can be reduced, so that behavioral couples therapy is effective in overcoming the problem of ineffective communication in couples.

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Ethics Policy

In this study there was no conflict of interest between researchers and there was no conflict of interest between researchers and participants or the members involved. All based on the agreement that has been agreed upon.

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