



BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS AND WISDOM FOR CULTIVATING FAMILY HARMONY- A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF BUDDHIST TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines how the Buddha's teachings can be applied to promote harmony within today's family systems, especially in the context of increasing emotional stress, broken relationships and conflict in a fast-paced, technology-driven world. The main goals of the study are to explore the core Buddhist teachings on family ethics, assess their practical relevance for everyday life, and suggest general principles that can support healthy and lasting family relationships.

The method used in this study is thematic content analysis, where important ideas from the texts were identified, grouped into themes, and then linked to common family issues seen today-like conflict between parents and children, emotional stress, or lack of communication between partners. Along with the primary texts, relevant commentaries and modern writings on Buddhist ethics and psychology were also referred to for deeper understanding.

The goal was to find how the original teachings of the Buddha could help us deal with real-life problems in families today. The study highlights important causes of disharmony, such as greed (lobha), anger (dosa), and delusion (moha), and also explores positive qualities like gratitude (kataññutā), patience (khanti), truthfulness (sacca), and loving-kindness (mettā), which can support healthy relationships. As a key contribution, the study offers a conceptual model that matches the common family problems with Buddhist teachings along with suggested actions thereby making it easier to see how the Dhamma can be applied in daily life. The study also brings together ideas like the Five Precepts and the Four Brahmavihāras that can be followed by anyone who wants to build a peaceful and caring home environment. This model may also serve as a foundation for future studies on the effectiveness of Buddhist approaches to real-world family issues. This research contributes new knowledge by presenting a conceptual model that systematically links Buddhist virtues with contemporary family conflicts

Keywords: Buddhist Ethics; Family Conflict; Harmony; Relationships; Sigālovāda Sutta,

INTRODUCTION

We are all living fast-paced lives. With the changing dynamics of family life and the ever-evolving new-age technology, society is becoming more isolated- surrounded less by human emotions and more by technology. It is no surprise that society is fragmenting, leading to emotional imbalance, short-lived, strained, unstable and superficial relationships, and an overall decline in individual well-being. This is contributed by insufficient communication between family members, less respect between partners, egos, dominance, and many other contributing elements.

Current trends highlight that the crumbling families are on the rise. For instance, although divorce rates in India have traditionally been low, recent data from the National Family and Health Survey (NFHS) shows a 35% increase in divorces over the past five years, particularly in urban centers such as Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru. Contributing factors include infidelity, financial disputes, loss of intimacy, domestic violence, and spousal abuse, with nearly 29.3% of women aged 18-49 reporting such abuse (Latest Laws.com, 2015).

Countries with the lowest divorce rates, like Sri Lanka and Vietnam, may reflect legal difficulties or societal barriers. Western countries are higher on the Divorce Chart with Maldives making 2002, which earned the country a Guinness World Record. (Worldpopulation review.com, 2024)

Simultaneously, the country faces a surge in its elderly population, projected to reach 179 million by 2026. The rise of old age homes- exceeding 1,000 by 2018- reflects a shift from traditional values that once revered parents as divine figures. However, a Statista survey indicated that 69% of elderly respondents found the available facilities inadequate, exposing a growing gap between family realities and societal support structures (Statista, 2023).

Specific issues such as poor communication, generation gaps, addiction, and behavioural problems are increasingly prevalent in today's families, resulting in mental health challenges, and rebellious behaviour among children, and neglect of elders. These trends underscore the urgent need for effective, sustainable approaches to conflict resolution and relationship-building.

In this context, this research investigates whether Buddhist teachings- particularly those found in the Tipitakā-can offer practical, universal solutions for sustaining peace and harmony within families. By examining key suttas such as the Sigālovāda Sutta, alongside other

canonical sources, the study aims to demonstrate how ancient Buddhist wisdom can address contemporary family challenges, strengthen relationships, and foster overall well-being.

Although previous studies have examined Buddhist ethics in relation to family issues, none have systematically mapped canonical teachings onto specific types of modern family conflict. This study fills that gap by using thematic coding and matrix tables to connect Buddhist teachings with real-life family problems. It also offers practical steps that families can take to resolve these issues.

AIM & OBJECTIVE

1. To analyse Buddha's teachings with a focus on family values.
2. To explore practical applications of these teachings in daily life.
3. To propose ethical models for maintaining family harmony.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chaiworamankul, Yota (2018) in his paper "Buddhist-based Solutions over the Thai Family Problems", elaborates the role of the sila and practice of Middle path and Eight Noble paths as prime in maintaining harmony in the family. With the help of Sigalovada sutta, he explained social role of families, children, Mother/ Parents. These social roles have been compared with ethical behavior, such as mutual trust, compassion, moral action, practiced under real understanding, and loving kindness. Sigālovāda sutta find mention in all the research paper when discussing the family harmony or relationship at various levels.

While highlighting the importance of equal good kamma of spouses, Dr. Sanu & Dr. Sarita Mahatthanadull (2017) in their paper- The Creation Of Buddhist Behavioural Model: Concept, Principal, And The Promotion Of Life And Family's Balance points out that the Unmatched couple refers to a couple with unmatched in preferences and tastes in terms of faith (samā-saddhā), morality (samā-sīlā), generosity (samā-cāgā) and wisdom (samā-paññā). Unsuccessful taste management, which is not consistent, will lead to disruption in family life. That's why sharing faith, love, morality, generosity and wisdom only just guarantee the life to come. Even though they practice according to the Principle but still there is no guarantee for them to meet each other forever in the same formation as human realms. It's very difficult to reborn in the same place, same time, same age in the same womb.

Swe Swe Mon (2019) in her research paper on Overcoming conflicts and tension within family: a Buddhist response sheds light on the conflicts between children and parents leading to considering old parents as burden when children grow up. She explains solution through samukhāvinaya that is dialogue between parents and children for all family conflicts.

In The Integrated Way for the Balance of Family Life Based on Buddhist Doctrines and Bowen's Theory, Sarita Mahatthanadull (2018) analyses selected Theravāda suttas alongside Bowen's family systems theory, with particular attention to faith, virtue, generosity and wisdom. This research paper scans many suttas and tries to explore conflicts with respect to three poisons- lobha, moha, and dosa.

RESULTS

1. DEFINITIONS

According to the Cambridge English Dictionary, family is “a group of people who are related to each other, such as a mother, a father, and their children.” Harmony is defined as “a situation in which people are peaceful and agree with each other, or when things seem right or suitable together.” Conflict is “an active disagreement between people with opposing opinions or principles.” These working definitions provide a foundation for examining how Buddhist teachings reinterpret such concepts in the context of family life.

2. REASONS OF THE CONFLICTS

Conflicts in a family unit involving a couple, their parents, and children can stem from a variety of interpersonal dynamics, lack of communications, generational differences, and moral or behavioural issues. These conflicts often lead to various challenges and emotional strains. Husband-Wife Conflicts can lead to separation & divorce. Parents-Kids Conflicts can lead kids to rebellious behaviour, strained relationships and mental health issues like anxiety or depression. The increasing rate of Divorces, growing demand for old age homes, overflowing jails and de-addiction centres are the extended results of these causes.

3. CONFLICTS BETWEEN SPOUSES CAN ARISE OUT OF

1) Ego clashes- belonging to different social strata, differences in income/salary, social status, professional success or failure, gender biases, and contemporary family roles.

2) Not being on the same page regarding household expenses, division of chores, and approaches to child-rearing.

3) Failure to maintain the sanctity of marriage- not spending enough time with family, emotional disconnect, expressing love only through materialistic gifts, etc.

4) Addiction of various kinds- alcohol, substance abuse, lottery, gambling.

5) Shouldering multiple responsibilities without support- leading to burnout, resentment, or emotional fatigue.

6) Unrealistic expectations from one another- over-comparison with other families or individuals, entitlement, lack of appreciation.

7) Poor communication or miscommunication- leading to misunderstandings, prolonged silence, or unresolved arguments.

8) Behavioural issues and emotional instability like- short temperament, anger, insecurity, suspicious nature, dominating behaviour etc

9) All above mentioned issues leading to Domestic violence

4. CONFLICTS BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILDREN CAN ARISE OUT OF

1) Conflicts arising from generation gap- children may find it difficult to connect with parents who hold on to old or regressive norms; lack of emotional support from parents

2) Helicopter parenting- not giving children enough space to grow, make mistakes, or develop independence

3) Children exhibiting problematic behaviour- frequent tantrums, non-sharing attitude, dis-respect toward elders, involvement in illegal habits or addictions, disregard for the value of money

4) Excessive digital/media consumption- reducing family bonding, encouraging isolation or imitation of harmful content

5) Lack of open communication or trust- children may hesitate to express concerns or parents may impose decisions unilaterally.

6) Perceived favouritism or biased parenting- leading to sibling rivalry or resentment

7) Not taking care of elderly parents or abusing mis-treating them, considering them as burden

5. BUDDHA’S TEACHINGS ON FAMILY & HARMONY:

The Pāli canon is rich source of the Buddha’s Teachings that comment on several aspects of household life. There are many suttas where the Buddha showed path to a harmonious and peaceful householder life arising out of conflicts. These suttas gives us a

comprehensive value of the Buddha's teaching that can act as antidote to many of the present day conflicts. The Sigālovāda Sutta is regarded as the Buddha's "householder's code," outlining six key directions of duties that structure household and social life. Among these, the duties between parents and children, and between husband and wife, are most directly related to family harmony. These relationships are emphasized as the foundation of household ethics, grounded in mutual respect, care, and protection. By highlighting these two core bonds, the sutta provides a practical guide for maintaining stability and harmony within the family (Sujato, 2018). The Vasala Sutta defines a true "outcaste" not by birth but by actions. Traits such as disrespect toward parents, verbal or physical abuse, arrogance and greed are highlighted as causes of disharmony. Any member of a family who has these characteristics will never have a stable mind, and his anxious behaviour will ruin the peace of the house. (Sujato, 2018)

The Parābhava Sutta highlights a comprehensive list of actions detrimental to the harmony of family co-existence and individual well-being. With its universal appeal, the sutta covers the causes of personal and social downfall such as neglecting parents, arrogance, indulgence in intoxicants, gambling, and infidelity, all of which undermine stability within families (Sujato, 2018). In Dhammapada's verse 53- Visakha Vatthu, the Vishakha, the Buddha's foremost lay disciple, is highly revered for embodying ideal behavior and dedication to the Dhamma. As she left for her in-laws' home after marriage, her father imparted in her the 10 secrets of happy married life to guide her in cultivating wisdom, patience, and skill in managing household life (Burlingame, 1921).

The Paṭṭhamasamajjivīsutta beautifully highlights the importance of shared values of faith, virtue, generosity, and wisdom between spouses as the foundation for marital harmony (Sujato, 2018). Pemasutta explains how love and hate are mutually conditioned: love may arise from love, hate may arise from love, love may arise from hate and hate may arise from hate. It warns against ego-centered views such as "I am" or "mine," emphasizing that letting go of such attachments is essential for equanimity and balanced relationships (Sujato, 2018). The Mangala Sutta presents the 'highest blessings' in life advocating caring for parents, cherishing one's spouse and children, and right livelihood, generosity, moral conduct and helping others, paired with abstaining from harmful actions and intoxicants, which together support peaceful family life (Sujato, 2018).

Saṅgaha Sutta, draws light on the importance of having generosity, kind speech, helpful conduct and impartiality as the four cornerstones for any relationship to be harmonious. The Buddha emphasizes that even parents would not receive love or respect from their children if these values were absent (Bodhi, 2012). The Katañṇu Sutta teaches that a grateful person is noble, while ingratitude is the mark of a rude person. The Buddha explains that parents are “hard to repay” because they give life, care, and guidance. A child can truly honor them not just through material support, but by helping them to grow in faith, virtue, generosity, and wisdom (Thanissaro, 2002). The Subhāsita Sutta teaches that good speech has four qualities: it is true, just, endearing, and beneficial. Such speech does not harm the speaker or the listener, avoids harshness and falsehood. It helps in building trust and peace. These qualities make communication mindful, supportive and helps prevent conflict thereby strengthening harmony in family life. (Thanissaro, 2020).

Summary the Buddha's teachings across these suttas present a practical, ethical, and emotionally intelligent framework for addressing modern family and marital challenges.. The Sigālovāda Sutta teaches mutual respect and responsibility, while Paṭṭhama Samajīvī Sutta talks about shared moral values, the Subhāsita & Saṅgaha Suttas advocates the importance of Right speech and open communication. The Pema Sutta advocates saying no to I, Me, Mine and giving away ego, the Maṅgala Sutta speaks on the dutiful living, parenting and partnership. The Vasala Sutta and Parābhava Sutta gives warning against downfall through vices. The Katañṇu Sutta is all about showing gratitude toward parents.

6. PRACTICAL APPLICATION: MAPPING CONFLICTS TO BUDDHIST SOLUTIONS

1) Matrix of Conflicts & Solutions: Between Spouses

Table 1 Conflicts & Buddhist Solutions- Spouses

Conflict Type/ Root	Buddhist Solution / Value	Practical Application / Exercise
Ego Clashes (<i>Lobha- diṭṭhi Māna</i>)	Gratitude (<i>Katañṇutā</i>), Empathetic joy (<i>Muditā</i>), Right View	- Weekly gratitude journaling - Compliment each other's efforts - Reflect on shared goals, not status

Conflict Type/ Root	Buddhist Solution / Value	Practical Application / Exercise
Disputes over chores, finances, parenting (<i>Moha</i>)	Mindful Co-living, <i>Sanṅgha</i> (social harmony), Compassion (<i>Karunā</i>)	- Co-create responsibility charts - Biweekly family meetings - Practice listening without interrupting
Emotional neglect, broken sanctity (<i>Dosa</i>)	Faithfulness (<i>Sīla</i>), Emotional engagements	- Tech-free family dinners - Express affection through time & words - Reflect on impermanence and priorities
Addiction (<i>Lobha</i>)	<i>Pañcasīla</i> , Non-attachment,	Mindfulness, Right Association
Burnout / Overload (<i>Moha</i>)	Compassion (<i>Karunā</i>), Equanimity (<i>Upekkhā</i>), Right Effort	- Rotate roles regularly - Schedule “me-time” for each member - Appreciate efforts aloud
Unrealistic Expectations / Entitlement (<i>Lobha</i>)	Contentment (<i>Santutthi</i>), Gratitude, Letting Go (<i>Vossagga</i>)	- Daily appreciation ritual - Reduce social comparison - Reflect on contentment
Communication breakdown (<i>Moha leading to Dosa</i>)	Right Speech, <i>Subhāsita</i> (well-spoken words), Loving-kindness	- Use "Pause–Think–Speak" method - Practice Nonviolent Communication - Daily emotional check-in moments
Anger, Suspicion, Emotional Instability (<i>Dosa</i>)	Right Mindfulness, Patience (<i>Khanti</i>), Restraint (<i>Samvara</i>)	- <i>Mettā</i> (loving-kindness) meditation - Journaling triggers & insights - Use breathing pauses in anger
Domestic Violence (<i>Dosa</i>)	non-violence (<i>Ahimsa</i>), <i>Pañcasīla</i> ,	- Refer to legal/medical services immediately

Conflict Type/ Root	Buddhist Solution / Value	Practical Application / Exercise
	Human Dignity	- Safe space and boundaries - Seek counseling support - Teach <i>sīla</i>-based relationships

2) Matrix of Conflicts & Solutions: Between Parents & Children

Table 2 Conflicts & Buddhist Solutions-Parents & Children

Generation gap (<i>Moha</i>)	Respect for Elders (<i>Kataññutā</i>), Right View	- Weekly “shared stories” session - Mutual learning approach - Open conversations rather than keeping issues to self.
Helicopter parenting (<i>Lobha</i>)	Non-delusion (<i>Amoha</i>) Non-attachment	- Offer choices to the child - Allow space for mistakes (failure is okay) - Encourage independence - Practice self-reflection for parents
3. Disrespectful children (<i>Moha</i>)	<i>Pañcasīla</i> , Good Friendship (<i>Kalyāṇamittatā</i>), Patience (<i>Khanti</i>)	- Precept-based storytelling (e.g. <i>Jātakas</i>) - Positive role modelling
4. Digital isolation (<i>Lobha</i>)	Right Mindfulness (<i>Sati</i>), Right Attention (<i>Yoniso Manasikāra</i>)	- Tech-free hours - Family mindfulness walks
5. Lack of trust (<i>Dosa</i>)	Right Speech, Open Dialogue	- “Worry Box” method, member anonymously/ openly write down their worries - Regular private 1-on-1 talks
6. Sibling rivalry / favouritism (<i>Dosa</i>)	Fairness (<i>Saṅgaha</i>), Equanimity	- Rotate privileges - Celebrate each child’s strengths

7. Neglect of elders (Dosa)	Gratitude (<i>Kataññutā</i>), Right Conduct	- Involve kids in care of grandparents - Teach through example & ritual (prayers, offering service)
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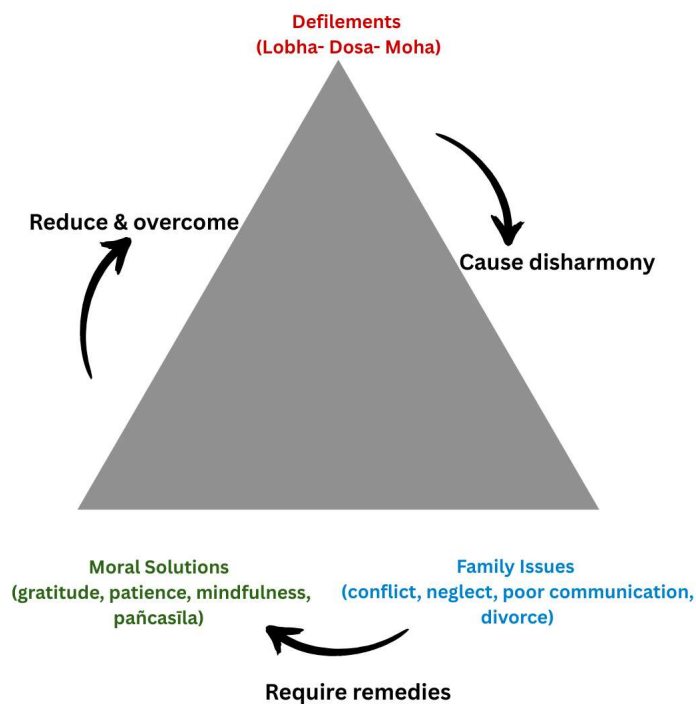


Figure 1 Conceptual framework showing how defilements generate family issues, which require remedies through Buddhist virtues that, in turn, reduce defilements

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to understand how Buddhist teachings- especially those found in the Tipiṭaka can help create harmony in families facing the demanding nature of modern life. The results show that the Buddha’s advice to laypeople, especially in suttas like the Sigālovāda sutta, Vasala sutta, Parābhava sutta, Saṅgha sutta and Kataññu suttas gives not just moral guidance but also practical ways to deal with family problems and build healthier relationships.

Swe Swe Mon’s (2019) view that respectful dialogue and mutual understanding between parents and children are key to resolving problems and experiencing peace and unity

aligns with encouraging open conversations. However, apart from this engaging children in caring for elders, practicing family rituals will improve hearty and emotional connect that will have more emotionally balanced relationship. Dr. Sanu & Dr. Sarita Mahatthanadull mentioned wholesome benefits of *samajīvidhamma* and *kataññūkataveditā* between spouses but there are far more facets of marital life that needs additional elements like *subhasita vācā*, practising *pañcasīla*, *saṃvar*, *khanti* to name a few.

While earlier studies have highlighted individual aspects of Buddhist family ethics such as respect between generations or gratitude and marital harmony this research goes further by bringing these elements together into an integrated model. Through thematic coding and the use of matrix tables, it systematically links Buddhist teachings on respect, gratitude, right speech, patience, and moral conduct with specific modern family problems, making the guidance both practical and comprehensive.

One of the key contributions of this research is linking the three unwholesome roots i.e greed (*lobha*), anger (*dosa*), and ignorance/delusion (*moha*) with common causes of family conflict. These are well-known in Buddhist psychology and are also reflected in modern studies on relationship breakdown. This study builds on that work by matching these negative roots with practical antidotes like gratitude, patience, honesty, and loving-kindness. These values were not just discussed in theory but were organized into daily practices that families can apply to improve their relationships.

The *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* further expands these roots into associated defilements such as envy, avarice, worry, conceit, sloth, doubt etc. These factors map closely to modern descriptions of resentment, jealousy, procrastination, and lack of trust within households, showing the depth of Buddhist psychological analysis. A unique feature of this research is the use of matrix tables that connect common family problems (like poor communication or generational conflict) with specific Buddhist teachings. These tools help translate ancient ethical values into everyday actions that families can actually use. This makes the teachings more accessible and practical for real-life situations.

In addition, by applying *Anattā* (non-self) and *Paṭiccasamuppāda* (Dependent Origination) conflicts are reframed as conditioned and transient rather than absolute. This perspective helps families move beyond cycles of blame and strengthens resilience. Further, by integrating the insights of mindfulness (*sati*) and the Four *Brahmavihāras*: *karuṇā*, *mettā*, *muditā* and *upekkhā* families can cultivate emotional balance and peace. As hypothesized in

this research paper, modern-day family conflicts can be alleviated by adopting the Buddha's teachings. If practiced widely these teachings may reduce problems such as marital breakdown, conflict between generations, and neglect of elders. Families that practice respect, clear communication, and mutual care are more likely to build strong and supportive relationships. Respecting elders also encourages younger members to live by virtuous values. When elders are respected for their wisdom, younger family members will naturally adopt virtuous behaviours. By handling disagreements properly, families grounded in morality, as outlined in the Four Noble Truths, pañcasīla and the Eightfold Path, will be respected in society and grow in merit.

Overall, the findings show that Buddhist values can play an important role in building emotional strength, kindness, and better communication in families. Because of this, the study recommends that family educators, counsellors, and community leaders consider using Buddhist-based practices- like gratitude exercises, mindfulness, and kind speech- in their work with families. At the same time, it is important to remember that in serious cases like abuse or deep psychological trauma, families should seek professional medical and psychological support, as both modern therapy and the Buddhist tradition advice.

In conclusion, this study highlights how Buddhist teachings remain relevant today, especially in helping families live with more peace and understanding. It also opens the door for future studies that can test how effective these teachings are in different cultures and real-life family settings.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. MAIN RESULTS

This study shows that the Buddha's teachings especially from suttas like the Sigālovāda Sutta, Vasala Sutta, and Parābhava Sutta remain highly relevant for addressing family problems today. These teachings emphasize ethics, respect, mindfulness, and emotional care. They also explain the root causes of conflict: greed (lobha), anger (dosa), and ignorance (moha) and provide practical ways to overcome them. The study developed a new model for family harmony that combines Buddhist virtues (gratitude, patience, honesty, loving-kindness) with the Five Precepts and the Four Brahmavihāras.

2. IMPLICATIONS

The findings show that families who practice gratitude, patience, honesty, and loving-kindness build stronger relationships. These virtues improve communication, prevent animosity and create emotional balance. When supported by mindfulness and moral conduct they lead to healthier family life. The study also links Buddhist psychology with modern research. It shows that greed, anger, and ignorance are the roots of many conflicts. These can be reduced by matching virtues as antidotes. In this way, Buddhist values help not only individuals but also families and society in reducing the rate of divorces, generational conflict and neglect of elders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For families

Make gratitude, patience, honesty and loving-kindness daily habits. Speak with respect, listen mindfully, and honour parents through simple rituals. Follow the Five Precepts as a family code to prevent conflict and strengthen harmony.

2. For Educators

Schools and universities should integrate mindfulness-based conflict resolution programs into curricula eg Ānāpāna sessions. Further practices like gratitude exercises, mindful speech, should be brought in as practical tools for relationship building

3. For Policymakers

Develop initiatives like Bhutan's "Gross National Happiness," where family harmony is a core social goal. Support Vipassanā centres, temples and community halls to provide training in mindfulness. At the policy level, governments can direct educational institutes to include family values, respect for elders and mindful parenting under value based education.

4. For Counselors/Therapists

The defilements- issues- solutions framework (Figure 1) can be used as a guide in therapy by linking family problems with matching Buddhist virtues, for example, patience for anger or honesty for mistrust. These practices can be combined with modern approaches such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), which reshapes negative thoughts, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), which reduces stress through mindfulness, and Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT), which strengthens empathy and secure bonds. Gratitude journaling and loving-kindness meditation also reflect Buddhist practices of *kataññutā* (gratitude) and *mettā*

bhāvanā (loving-kindness). Together they provide counselors with a culturally sensitive and practical way to build emotional balance and family harmony.

5. For Researchers

Test this model urgently in real households across cultures. Measure its impact on reducing divorce, generational conflict, and neglect of elders to prove its practical value.

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