

An Evaluation Of Trans-
Generational Family
Counselling And Family
Rituals As A Hinge For
Cohesive Parenting: A
Case Study Of Selected
Families In Kampala
District

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ABSTRACT

The study evaluated Trans-generational family counselling and Family rituals as a hinge for cohesive parenting in Kampala District (Uganda). The research questions were: How is transgenerational family counselling practiced? What is the nature of family rituals? How does family emotional levels and family rituals impact on parenting cohesiveness? The study randomly selected 412 family members (female (60%) and male (40%) respondents), guided by Family Environment Scale, Family Ritual Questionnaire and Parental Psychological Control as study instruments. Study findings revealed the increase in self differentiation (Mean: 49.52, SD = 11.78), family routines (Mean: = 58.46, SD =15.60) and parental warmth (Mean: 48.53, SD = 9.30). However, there was a decrease in the family emotional systems (Mean: 25.33, SD = 5.89), family celebrations (Mean: 12.76, SD = 3.50) and parental control (Mean: 39.19, SD = 11.67). The study concluded that the family rituals had a strong relationship with family therapies and parental cohesion. The research recommended that the religious and all cultural institutions should endeavour to engage families to form functional family rituals.

Key words: Trans-generational family counselling; Family rituals; cohesive parenting

1. INTRODUCTION

This section dealt with the background of the study including the conceptual perspective, contextual perspective, statement of the problem, research question and conceptual framework.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY*Conceptual perspective*

Transgenerational Family counselling also known as intergenerational family therapy was developed by Murray Bowen who understood family as an emotional unit, a network of interlocking relationships, best known when analyzed within a multigenerational historical framework (Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 1991). Families and other natural systems respond in organized, patterned behaviours. Family emotional systems are transmitted from one generation to the other. The emotions manifest in form of anxiety which can be transmitted from one family member to another. The transgenerational family counselling revisits different family rituals across various family generations cognizant to the emotional involvement of the family members. Kerr and Bowen (1988) argued that the eight interlocking concepts explain the emotional processes taking place in the nuclear and extended families over generation. These are also called forces of family functioning (Goldenberg et al., 2008). The transgenerational family counselling utilizes family rituals.

Rituals mark the transition from one's personal, social or religious status to another exists in every known society (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1993). Some of the particular transitions marked, reflecting life cycle changes in people's bodies, are themselves are universally shared within various families. Eboussi-Boulaga

(1984) as cited in Naisiko (2012) refers to rituals as an “imaginary praxis’ operating in the network of symbols manifested in behaviors. Schechner (1994) rituals are performative, acts done, codified, repeatable, authoritatively designed and intrinsically valued. According to Marshal (1998) rituals are often repeated patterns of behaviour which are performed at appropriate times and involve use of symbols.

Fiese et al., (2002) asserted that family rituals are a set of behaviours that are repeated and symbolically meaningful. Family rituals offer families with a sense of identity and belonging from one generation to another. In addition, family rituals are a symbolic form of communication that, because of the satisfaction that family members experience through its repetition, is acted out in a systematic fashion over time. Through their special meaning and repetitive nature, rituals can contribute significantly to the establishment and preservation of a family's collective sense of itself, which we call the 'family identity' (Bennett, L. A., Wolin, S. J., & Reiss, D., 1988, p. 825). The family rituals are initiated through parenting and nurturance of children so as to make them part and partial of the children’s lifestyle.

Lunts (2003) asserted that parenting refers to implementing a series of decisions about the socialization of one’s children. This involves raising children based on the biopsychosocial needs. Parenting enables children to become responsible, members of society. Parenting is the means by which the family socializes children basing on the following dimensions; physical, social, emotional, psychological, spiritual and economical/material. Parenting involves parents, guardians, stepparents, siblings, members of extended family, and any other adults who might carry the primary responsibilities for a child’s health, development and education into the meaning of “parents”.

Contextual perspective

The context of family therapy in Uganda is closely linked with couple and family HIV/AIDS counselling (Haour-Knipe, 1996). Family therapy has gained momentum in Uganda with the presence of HIV/AIDS. This explains the reason as to why family therapies have been mainly used to handle HIV/AIDS family, couple and children related issues.

The study gained an inspiration from Karin Weber’s (2013) argument that the Uganda family social problems that are prevalent are due to the collapsing and disappearing family rituals in the presence of the underutilized African and western family therapies. The Ugandan society had transitions that are recognized as part of family rituals exercised in life cycles rituals. It is amidst this context that Kampala Capital City Authority experiences new challenges ranging from urbanization, industrialization, globalization and salaried employment. These have impacted on the family and parenting dynamics which has given birth to new trends of child day care takers, house girls and baby sitters, nursery and primary boarding schools. These parenting agents have left children in non biological care takers who do not adequately bond the children due to the life

and work hassles. The non biological caretakers do not have direct biological maternal and paternal instincts for the children raised in these places.

In the process of contextualizing family rituals the *Ganda* rites of passage came into play where Boys and girls are expected to conform in their behaviour. Burton et al., (2010) elaborated that aunts, uncles and grandparents instruct children soon after entering puberty stage on the future domestic responsibilities. This involves the parenting roles and responsibilities that are transmitted from one generation to another. The linking factor to transgenerational family therapy is embedded in family rituals that support an ongoing counselling and follow up that have to be made. In this way, *Nabagereka's Kisaakate* (Queen's cultural counselling club) as a ritual club is used to provide family ritual education (Burton et al., 2010). The problem discussed in conceptual and contextual perspectives of the study brings out a direct link with the statement of the problems of the study.

2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

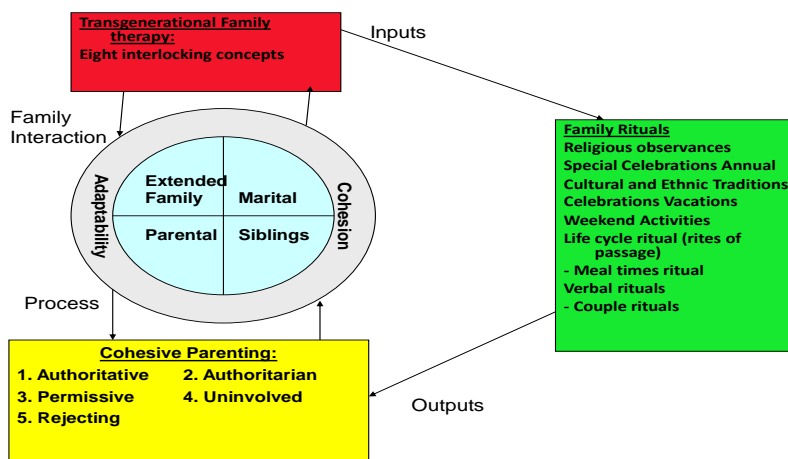
The functionality of emotional levels in the family rituals creates family cohesiveness. However, the malfunctionality of emotional ranking within the family impairs family cohesiveness, where the members lack sense of autonomy and differentiation. Children are key members who are parented in such a non-cohesive environment. The lack of functional emotional levels exposes the family to compromised family rituals whereby such emotional deficit and weakened family rituals impact on the nature of parenting dynamics. The family systems were hinged on the transgenerational frame work that was guided by family rituals as way of enhancing parenting (Baxter, 2010; Bamaurind, 1991; Fiese & Hooker, 1993). Despite the scholars' propositions, the parenting today is at crossroads. As a result, this has led to dysfunctional behaviours among children in families, schools, communities and societies. The study sought to evaluate how transgenerational family therapy and family rituals can be a pivot of cohesive parenting.

Research questions

The research questions were: How does trans-generational family counselling create emotional bonding? What is the nature of family rituals? How does family emotional levels and family rituals impact on parenting cohesiveness?

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Figure 1: Interactivity of Trans-generational family counselling, Family rituals and cohesive parenting

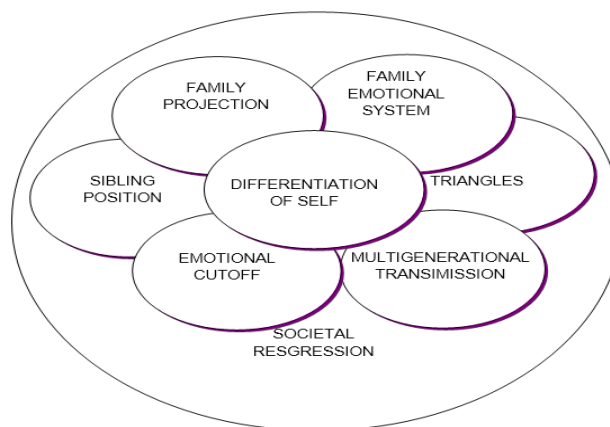


Source: researchers (2015)

3.1 TRANSGENERATIONAL FAMILY COUNSELLING

The eight interlocking concepts of transgenerational family counselling that connect and clarify how the family functions to manage anxiety on the individual, dyadic and systemic levels (Augsburger, 1986).

Figure 2: The eight interlocking concepts of family systems theory



Source: adopted from Augsburger (1986).

3.2 THE BOWEN FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY OF EIGHT INTERLOCKING CONCEPTS IN THEMATIC EXPLANATION

Differentiation of self: Kerr & Bowen (1988) argued that differentiation is the ability a family member to define his or her own life's goals and values irrespective of the societal/family pressures.

Triangles: The family's emotional system is based on triangles seen in the Father, Mother and Child (Bitter, 2014). The other triangles are; parents-child-grandparent. Stress between husband and wife may arise as they attempt to balance their need for closeness with their needs for individuation.

Family Emotional System: The emotional system entails how the family handles closeness, distance and anxiety (anxiety in family is directed to marriage, one spouse, on child in form of marital conflict (Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 1991). One responds to others by complementing, cutoff and rebel/attack.

Family Projection: This addresses how the way parental tension immaturity are projected or put onto children and other people in the family system (Corey, 2009). The projection process operates within the mother-father-child triangle; whereby anxiety is displaced by one of the parents to the child.

Sibling Position: This involves the rank order of children in the family. One would expect the order to follow chronological birth order, but this rarely happens. The child with the lowest level of self is ranked number one, the next is number two (Bitter, 2009).

Emotional Cutoff: Bitter. (2014) asserted that emotional cutoff is a flight from unresolved emotional ties, not true emancipation, and avoidance of attachments and denial of unresolved conflicts.

Multigenerational Transmission Process: Goldenberg and Goldenberg (1991) argue that no symptom is ever just one generation deep. A minimum of three generations are involved in severe personal problems of the self, parents and grandparents who are a repetition of the parents' emotional style. The flow of anxiety in a family system is generational.

Societal Regression: Bitter (2014) argues that society is like a family, contains within it the forces toward undifferentiated and towards individual progression or regression depending on the existing differentiation.

The above eight interlocking concepts of Bowen can be handled using Genogram. Carter, & McGoldrick (1989) assert that the genogram gives a vast sum of insight for the therapist.

3.3 NATURE OF FAMILY RITUALS

There are various aspects that explain the family rituals in which several parenting modalities manifest in the family functions. Doherty (1997) emphasizes three items that make up family rituals that include; Special meaning or significance, Repetition and coordination, which facilitate family bonding.

Fiese and Kline (1993) suggested eight dimensions of family rituals that promote family cohesion. These eight dimensions include the following (Fiese and Kline, 1993): Occurance (how often ritual takes place); Roles (assignment of parts and duties); Routines (regularity in how activity is conducted); Attendance (expectation about whether presence is mandatory); Affect (emotional investment in the activity); Symbolic significance (attachment of meaning to aactivity); Continuation (perseverance of activity across generations)

and Deliberateness (advance preparation and planning associated with activity). The dimensions of family rituals are manifested in different types of family rituals.

The family rituals are practiced in different settings and are multidimensional. Wolin and Bennett (1984) discovered three types of family rituals (these are family celebrations, family traditions and family routines) that differ by setting and the degree to which they are connected to cultural practices.

3.4 COHESIVE PARENTING

There are four general theories have been utilized to explain the transition to parenthood: systems theory, developmental theory, role theory, and dialectical theory.

Systems theory: Minuchin (1974) argued that the strain felt after a child is born is due to competition between the spousal subsystem and the parental subsystems: that is, the spousal relationship may be compromised through the additional demand of raising a child.

Cowan and Cowan's five dimensions epitomize a systems perspective, as applied to new parents. An example they use to link various areas is offered: "Think, for example, of a man who feels anxious about becoming a new father (inner life) and wants to be more involved with his child than his father was with him (quality of relationships in family of origin) but feels pressured by the demands of his job – stress outside the family (Cowan& Cowan, 1992).

Developmental theory: Rossi (1968), who helped shift the focus from "crisis" to "transition," did so with the understanding that a transition implies a movement from one stage to another, in this case a movement from pre-parenthood to parenthood. Other researchers have echoed this assumption, including the identification of the transition as a normal developmental event for married adults (Miller and Sollie, 1980), the examination of the family life cycle during the transition (Entwisle &Doering, 1981), and how pregnancy and parenthood progress from one stage to the next (Feldman &Nash, 1984).

Role theory: Cowan and colleagues (1985) have examined role strain during the transition to parenthood using a "pie" analogy. Individual spouses are asked to both list and divide their main roles (on a circle) before and after the birth of their child.

Dialectical theory: The transition to parenthood can also be examined through dialectical theory, an approach concerned with inherent contradictions that include autonomy versus connectedness, expressive versus instrumental communication, and stability versus change (Rossi 1968; Belsky *et al.*, 1983). The parenting styles are dialectical in nature given the different levels of socio-emotional connectivity that exist in the relationship.

Parenting styles play an important role in child development (Baumrind, 1991). Diana Baumrind (1966) a renowned child rearing psychologist became particularly interested in the connection between the parental behaviour and the development of instrumental competence, which refers to the ability to manipulate the environment to achieve ones goals. The parenting styles are based on the responsiveness vs. unresponsiveness and demanding vs. undemanding (parental control vs. warmth).

3.5 AFRICAN VIEW ON PARENTING

Childhood socialization in traditional Africa was geared to achievement of specific objectives. Children were brought up to fit well into the traditional social fabric. Members of the extended family system, together with community elders, friends, and neighbors, participate in child upbringing (Achebe, 1958). Ayot (1979) argued that:

“When we say that African people have a great love for children, it is not for any kind of child. It is for the well-bred child. This is why the big challenge faced by present family specialists and educators in Africa is how to construct and promote that caliber of curriculum that can assist in making every modern African child a well-bred child”

The researchers agrees with the above writer whereby the children in the African family belong to the community and are raised for the community well being. According to Nwoye, (2000).

“Traditional African culture places enormous emphasis on seniority. Elders including one’s parents are to be respected. Obedience to one’s parents is highly valued while resistance to their commands is frowned on”.

4. METHODOLOGY

This research employed Exploratory – Case study design against this background, a case study was used because a lot can be learnt from a few examples of selected families’ social issues (Blaxter et al, 2010).

The case study enabled the researchers to analyze the family emotional levels, family rituals, this assisted the researchers to get respondent’s/informant’s beliefs, attitudes and opinions about the topic of investigation (Gay, 1996).

4.1 AREA OF THE STUDY

The study was carried out in Kampala- district of central Uganda. This is because the key respondents and informants handling issues of transgenerational family counselling and family rituals in relationship to parenting could easily be found. The program of “*Nabagereka’s Kisaakate*” (*cultural initiation programs by the queen of Buganda in Uganda*) played a vital role in provision of the information required for the study. The study area was also relevant because it has various counselling centres like Wamukisa teenage counselling centre, Hope and Beyond rehabilitation centre, Consider counselling centre, Mbuya reach out, Rapport counselling centre, Matunda ya wazee, Recovery solutions among others.

4.2 STUDY POPULATION

Family members from eight counselling centres within Kampala District participated in the study. They were aged between 10 to 70+ years and were randomly selected using the counselling centres the sampling frame. The final sample consisted of 412 family members. There were more female (60%) than male (40%) respondents from varying socio-economic environments and ethnicity, since the area is cosmopolitan in nature.

4.3 STUDY INSTRUMENTS AND MEASURES

Family Environment Scale

The Family Environment Scale (FES) is a self-administered test that assesses the social climate and functioning of all types of families. There are 90 items to which participants have to respond with either "True" or "False". The questionnaire examines three family environment dimensions. These dimensions include the (a) family relationships, with the subscales cohesion, expressiveness and conflict; (b) family system maintenance, with the subscales organization and control, and (c) the personal growth dimension, with 5 subscales: independence-autonomy, achievement, intellectual-cultural activities, active recreational activities, and -moral-religious.

Three subscales in the family relationships dimension were deemed relevant for the present study (such as, cohesion, expressiveness and conflict).

Family Ritual Questionnaire

This questionnaire was adopted from Fiese and Kline (1993). The FRQ is a 56 item questionnaire which explores rituals in seven settings emerge from family routines (Baxter & Clark, 1996). These settings include Dinnertime, Weekends, Vacations, Annual Celebrations (birthdays, anniversaries, among others), Special Celebrations (weddings, graduations, family reunions, among others.), Religious Holidays (Christmas, Idi days , Easter, among others), and Cultural and Ethnic Traditions (baptisms, naming ceremonies, funerals, among others). Each setting contains eight statements. The participant are to read the statements and decide whether each one is "really true" of their family or "sort of true" of their family.

The FRQ measured seven dimensions of these family rituals. These dimensions are Occurrence (how often the activity occurs), Roles (assignment of roles within the activity), Routine (regularity of activity's occurrence), Attendance (expectations about who attends the activity), Affect (emotional investment in the activity), Symbolic Significance (attachment of meaning to the activity), and Deliberateness (advance preparation for the activity). According to Fiese's FRQ scoring manual the Ritual Meaning Factor is calculated by summing the scores of the Occurrence, Affect, Symbolic Significance, and Deliberateness dimensions. The FRQ scoring directions indicate which items in each setting fall under each of the seven dimensions.

Parental Psychological Control (Barber, 1996)

Mothers' use of psychological control was reported by children. Barber's (1996) eight-item scale, which was a revised version of the Children's Report of Parental Behaviour Inventory (CRPBI; Schaefer, 1965), was used in this study. Children were asked to describe their mothers by choosing responses on a 3-point Likert scale with "not like her" = 1; "somewhat like her" = 2 and "a lot like her" = 3. Examples of items are: The higher the scores the more controlling mothers are perceived. Examples of items include: My mother is a person who is always trying to change how I feel or think about things. My Mother is a person who changes the subject whenever I have something to say. The children were asked to circle their response.

Guided by the above standardized scales statistical data analysis techniques were employed guided by the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS).

5. STUDY FINDINGS

Table 1. Descriptive statistical findings for the study variables (n= 412)

Variables	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	SD
Family Routines	58.46	4	92	15.60
Family emotional system	25.33	5	35	5.89
Self-Differentiation	49.52	4	65	11.78
Parental Control	39.19	6	71	11.67
Parental warmth	48.53	33	75	9.30
Family celebrations	12.76	8	24	3.50

Source: researchers (2015)

Descriptive statistical findings of the study variables are presented in Table 1. The study revealed that with the increase in self differentiation with the mean score of (Mean: 49.52, *SD* = 11.78) of the family members through transgenerational family counselling that increased the family routines with the mean score of (Mean: = 58.46, *SD* =15.60) as family rituals that consolidated parental warmth with the mean score of (Mean: 48.53, *SD* = 9.30), thus further increased the parental cohesiveness and that of the entire family system.

However, with the decrease in the family emotional systems functioning with the mean score of (Mean: 25.33, *SD* = 5.89) based on the operations of the transgenerational family coounselling, this led to the decrease of family celebrations with the mean score of (Mean: 12.76, *SD* = 3.50) as family rituals as a result of parental control that is based on parenting dimension with the means score of (Mean: 39.19, *SD* = 11.67)

Case study findings on alcoholism

Case study 1: Alcoholism

Peter is a 39-year-old male, married with two children, Tim who is 5 and Jane who is 2. Peter is a fresh food salesman who owns his own business for the last seven years. Peter drinks alcohol on a daily basis with an average of four beers each evening, he

hangs out with his friends, and claims he is stressed and this is the only way for him to relax or deals with stress. Peter exhibits mood swings, skirmish talk and irritability while at home with his family.

Peter and Sarah have been married for four years and have two children together. Sarah has threatened to divorce Peter he does not to attend family counseling. Sarah reveals that from the birth of their first born Peter is increasingly less available at home and their communication is so paralyzed that she often feels like a divorced parent. Sarah believes that Peter is cheating on her given his unbecoming behaviour hanging out with friends.

Sarah is concerned that Peter's drinking, skirmish talk and irritability are affecting the children in a negative way.

Peter is reluctant to go for counseling, due to Sarah's threat to divorce him. Peter feels that Sarah is overreacting and has stated that he is so busy and stressed as the economy has been rough this year. According to Peter they do not need therapy and states that his wife is so demanding all the time.

Peter comes from a divorced family with an alcoholic father and a workaholic mother. Peter's father has been in several relationships and re-married four times. Peter's father perpetually calls Peter to help her with money, because he does not work. Peter rarely sees his mother.

Source: Informant (2015)

In applying, multigenerational family therapy Peter and Sarah will begin to understand how their transgenerational emotional system manifests in their family life. For Sarah, Peter is drinking alcohol excessively while distancing from her and giving more time to his drinking friends. Peter feels unconcerned and seems to feel that Sarah has no sounding reason to think the way she does, just because he sees nothing wrong in his behaviors.

5.1 PETER AND SARAH'S CASE TRANSCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION

During the interview guide in Peter and Sarah's case, it was realized that the lack of communication, alcohol use and fused relationship with Peter's Father created a pattern of family dysfunctions that occurred in their relationship. Peter's father transmitted his emotional problems to him in that he is in continuous need to satisfy the father's needs and negatively copes with his issues by drinking as his father did throughout his entire childhood. Peter's differentiation of self seems to be strongly fused with his father as he perpetually seeks his approval and acceptance leading to marital conflicts and serious family dysfunctions. While employing Bowen's family therapy, the therapist used various healing techniques; Process questioning, de-individuation, de-triangulation and developed a genogram that enabled to identify multigenerational patterns and dysfunction from childhood that developed in Peter and Sarah's marriage and family life.

The researchers got an insight about the Peter's differentiation of self that is reflected in the interaction between peter's drinking, skirmish talk, belief that he is cheating and missing at home identifies and how Sarah sees the drinking behavior and how it is affecting their relationship, identifying the emotional systems working in the family.

From a multigenerational family therapeutic approach, process questions as a technique enabled Sarah to identify how she feels about Peter's behavior while expressing her concern and connecting to family history of alcoholism. At the same wave length, the process questions enabled Peter to express his feelings that are identified with his father's current behaviors and how it affects him and his family life.

This enhanced Peter to identify a new behavior in which he can see how the process went hence positively responding to therapeutic change thereby getting involved in the family life activities.

5.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the statistical findings as presented in Table 1, the research exposed that there was an increase in differentiation of self of several family members with the mean score of (Mean: 49.52, $SD = 11.78$) of the family members through transgenerational family counselling. The findings are in agreement with Kerr & Bowen (1988) who argued that differentiation of self is the ability of a family member to define his or her own life's goals and values irrespective of the societal/family pressures. The researchers concur with the findings and the authors given the fact that differentiation of self increases the family members' level of individuation at the balance between the emotional diffusion or fusion in the family system to give societal progression.

Goldenberg & Goldenberg (1991) clarified that the emotional system entails how the family handles closeness, distance and anxiety in family as directed to marriage, one spouse, or to child in form of marital conflict. One responds to others by complementing, cutoff or rebellion against the family systems. This kind of emotional cutoff or rebellion is reflected in the study findings with the decrease in the family emotional systems functioning with the mean score of (Mean: 25.33, $SD = 5.89$) based on the operations of the transgenerational family counselling.

The researchers in comparing the findings and the two scholars' argument got an insight about the family members' level of differentiation of self to have affected the individuals' level of emotional manifestation when faced with anxiety.

Walsh, F., (2006) elaborated that family routines are rituals which are most frequently enacted but least consciously planned by the participants. The family routines are manifested in the patterns and habits in the family activities that are repeated over time and well coordinated. The study findings revealed that there was a mean score of (Mean: = 58.46, $SD = 15.60$) in the family routines. Whereas for the family celebrations there was a mean score of (Mean: 12.76, $SD = 3.50$) that is in agreement with Fiese (2006) who asserted that family celebrations are rituals in which the family observes holidays or occasions that are widely practiced by the culture and are special in the family. Wolin and Bennett (1984) argued that the occasions such as funerals, weddings, baptisms, religious holidays, secular holidays and thanksgiving are family celebrations.

The other form of family rituals is family traditions are activities which are less culture-specific and more unique to each family (Cox Meg, 2012). The events included in this category are vacations, visits to and from extended family members, anniversary and birthday customs, parties with special food and music, participation in community events, and activities with kin.

According to table. 1 it was found out that there was consolidated parental warmth with the mean score of (Mean: 48.53, $SD = 9.30$), thus further increased the parental cohesiveness and that of the entire family system. In addition, the result of parental control based on parenting dimension with the means score of (Mean: 39.19, $SD = 11.67$). The findings are in agreement with Diana Baumrind (1966) who considered the four basic elements that could help shape successful parenting: responsiveness vs. unresponsiveness and demanding vs. undemanding (parental control vs. warmth). From these, she identified three general parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive Parenthood is core as it shapes the future members of the society and it must be based on psychosocial family rights. Baumrind did not argue that in terms of child outcome, the authoritarian nor were the permissive parenting styles as successful as the authoritative parenting style (Baumrind, 1966, 1967, 1968, 1993).

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that the family rituals through family routines are impacted by family therapies through the family emotional functioning with a balance between parental warmth and parental control. The family rituals within the family system had a strong relationship with family therapies thereby creating parental cohesion and adaptability in family life.

The study recommended through the ministry of health, ministry of education and the Uganda counselling association should promote the practical implementation of the Transgenerational family counselling to be practiced in Uganda.

The research recommended that the religious and all cultural institutions should endeavour that all the families should have consistent family routines that form functional family rituals. When the family rituals are well practiced this creates parental cohesion in the family system.

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