

Support of Health Care in Family Life Cycle

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Abstract

The family is the fundamental social unit influencing health behaviours, disease prevention, caregiving, emotional support, and health service utilization across the life span. The concept of the family life cycle explains predictable developmental stages through which families pass, including formation, childbearing, childrearing, launching children, middle age, and ageing. Each stage presents unique health needs and demands targeted healthcare support. This paper examines the role of healthcare support throughout the family life cycle, emphasizing preventive, promotive, curative, rehabilitative, and palliative dimensions. A narrative review methodology was used by examining published literature from family nursing, community medicine, public health, and health systems research. Findings indicate that newly formed families require reproductive counselling and mental health support; childbearing families need antenatal, postnatal, and immunization services; families with adolescents need nutritional, psychosocial, and reproductive health guidance; middle-aged families require chronic disease screening and lifestyle modification; and ageing families need geriatric, home-based, and caregiver support services. Family-centered healthcare models improve treatment adherence, resilience, health literacy, and continuity of care. However, barriers such as poverty, urbanization, fragmented families, caregiver burden, and unequal healthcare access reduce effectiveness. Strengthening primary healthcare, digital health linkage, community outreach, and family nursing approaches can improve outcomes across all stages. The study concludes that healthcare systems must recognize the family as both a recipient and provider of care. Integrating life-cycle based family support into national health programs can reduce morbidity, improve quality of life, and promote healthy ageing. Family-centered healthcare remains essential for sustainable universal health coverage and population wellbeing in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: family life cycle; family-centered care; preventive health; caregiver support; primary healthcare

Introduction

The family is universally recognized as the primary social institution that shapes the physical, emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing of individuals throughout life. From birth to old age, family members influence health beliefs, nutrition, hygiene practices, emotional resilience, caregiving behaviour, and the use of health services. Because of this central role, the

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Published: 29 April 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70558/IJSSR.2026.v3.i2.301037>

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family is often described as both a recipient and provider of healthcare [1]. Effective healthcare systems therefore need to understand not only the individual patient, but also the family environment in which health behaviours are formed and maintained. [2]

The concept of the family life cycle [3] provides a developmental framework for understanding how families evolve through predictable stages over time [4]. These stages commonly include family formation, childbearing, families with young children, families with adolescents, launching adult children, middle-aged families, and ageing families [5]. Each stage is characterized by different developmental tasks, responsibilities, stresses, and health priorities. Newly formed families may require reproductive counselling and mental health support [6], whereas families with children need immunization, nutrition, and developmental guidance. Similarly, middle-aged and older families often face chronic disease management, disability, caregiving burdens, and end-of-life issues.[7,8]

Rapid social changes such as urbanization, migration, delayed marriage, declining fertility, nuclear family structures, and increasing life expectancy have transformed traditional family support systems.[9] Many households now experience reduced informal caregiving capacity, increased mental stress, and fragmented intergenerational relationships. As a result, formal healthcare systems are increasingly expected to provide services once managed within families. [10,11]

Family-centred healthcare emphasizes partnership between professionals and families in planning, decision-making, treatment adherence, rehabilitation, and emotional support. [12,13] This model has been associated with better patient satisfaction, improved chronic disease outcomes, stronger caregiver confidence, and continuity of care. Understanding healthcare needs across the family life cycle is therefore essential for designing responsive public health programs, strengthening primary healthcare, and promoting healthy communities. [14,15]

Rationale of the Study

Although modern medicine has advanced considerably in diagnostics, therapeutics, and technology, many health interventions remain less effective when the family context is overlooked. Health behaviours such as diet, exercise, medication adherence, smoking, alcohol use, stress coping, and healthcare seeking are strongly influenced by family relationships and household environments. Therefore, treating individuals in isolation may fail to address the broader determinants of health. [16,17,18]

The rationale for this study arises from the need to examine healthcare support as a dynamic requirement that changes across stages of family development.[19] A young couple planning pregnancy requires different services compared with parents managing adolescent behavioural issues or elderly couples coping with frailty and chronic disease. Recognizing these transitions allows health systems to anticipate needs rather than respond only after illness occurs. [[20,21]

Another important reason is the rising burden of non-communicable diseases, mental health disorders, ageing populations, and caregiver stress. [22] Families are increasingly responsible for home-based management of diabetes, hypertension, stroke, dementia, disability, and

palliative care. Without adequate professional guidance and support, family caregivers may experience burnout, financial strain, anxiety, and reduced quality of life. [23,24]

In countries such as India and other low- and middle-income nations, family structures remain central to health support, yet healthcare planning often focuses mainly on maternal-child care or hospital-based treatment. A life-cycle approach can integrate preventive, promotive, curative, rehabilitative, and palliative services across all family stages. This paper therefore seeks to highlight the importance of family-oriented healthcare planning for better population health outcomes and sustainable universal health coverage. [25,26,27]

Literature Review

Existing literature strongly supports the concept that families play a critical role in health promotion, illness management, and recovery. Family systems theory suggests that illness affecting one member influences the functioning of the entire household. Consequently, healthcare interventions that include family participation tend to be more effective than those focused solely on individuals. [1,2,28,29]

Kokopelli's et al. conducted a scoping review proposing a universal model of family-centred care and found that collaborative relationships between healthcare providers, patients, and families improve communication, satisfaction, trust, and continuity of care. The review emphasized respect, information sharing, and shared decision-making as key components of successful family-centred practice. [1,2,3,4,5,30]

Research in maternal and child health demonstrates that family support significantly influences pregnancy outcomes, breastfeeding success, newborn care, and child development. César-Santos et al. highlighted the value of family nursing interventions during the transition to parenthood, especially home visits, parental education, and psychosocial support. Such approaches reduce anxiety and improve parenting confidence. [2,6,9,19,31,32]

Studies on child and adolescent health show that supportive family environments are associated with better nutrition, school performance, emotional wellbeing, and lower risk of substance abuse or risky sexual behaviour. Conversely, family conflict, neglect, or poor communication may contribute to depression, violence, obesity, and behavioural disorders. [5,11,24,32,33]

Among adults and middle-aged populations, family involvement improves management of chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and cancer. Families often assist with medication reminders, transport to appointments, dietary changes, and emotional encouragement. Evidence indicates that patients with stronger family support demonstrate better adherence and lower hospitalization rates. [3,12,23,28,34,35]

The literature on ageing and geriatric care further highlights the indispensable role of families. Older adults frequently depend on spouses or children for mobility assistance, medication management, companionship, and financial support. However, caregiver burden is increasingly recognized as a major public health issue. Sherman emphasized that family caregivers should be treated as members of the healthcare team and provided training, counselling, and respite care. [10,19,25,34]

Recent family nursing scholarship identifies the family as the unit of care rather than merely the background context of the patient. Luttik argued that healthcare research and practice should systematically include family functioning, resilience, coping capacity, and caregiving roles when assessing outcomes. [7,18,20,35]

Overall, the literature confirms that healthcare support across the family life cycle improves prevention, treatment success, psychosocial wellbeing, and healthy ageing. Nevertheless, gaps remain in implementing structured life-cycle approaches within primary healthcare systems, especially in resource-limited settings. [12,25,33,36]

Methodology

This paper adopted a narrative review methodology to examine the concept of healthcare support across the family life cycle and to synthesize available evidence from public health, family medicine, nursing, and health systems literature. A narrative review was considered appropriate because the topic is multidisciplinary and includes both empirical studies and conceptual frameworks related to family-centred healthcare.

Databases and Information Sources

A structured literature search was conducted using the following electronic databases and sources:

- PubMed/MEDLINE
- PubMed Central (PMC)
- Google Scholar
- Scopus (where indexed references were available)
- Web of Science (selected sources)
- WHO publications and reports
- Open-access nursing and public health journals
- Government and institutional websites for policy documents and family health frameworks

These sources were selected to ensure broad coverage of peer-reviewed articles, review papers, policy guidance, and relevant grey literature.

Search Strategy

The literature search included publications mainly from **2010 to 2026**, with priority given to recent evidence (2019–2026). Foundational earlier studies were included when relevant to the family life cycle model.

The following keywords and Boolean combinations were used:

- “Family life cycle”
- “Family health care”
- “Family-centred care”
- “Family nursing”

- “Health support in families”
- “Caregiver support AND family”
- “Maternal child health AND family”
- “Adolescent health AND family support”
- “Healthy ageing AND family care”
- “Primary health care AND family approach”

Searches were refined using combinations such as:

- family life cycle AND healthcare needs
- family-centred care AND chronic disease
- caregiver burden AND elderly family care
- family nursing AND transition to parenthood

Reference lists of selected studies were also manually screened to identify additional relevant publications.

Selection Criteria

Inclusion Criteria

Studies and documents were included if they:

1. Discussed healthcare needs or support at one or more stages of the family life cycle.
2. Focused on family-centred care, family nursing, caregiving, or household health behaviour.
3. Included preventive, promotive, curative, rehabilitative, or palliative care aspects.
4. Were peer-reviewed articles, systematic reviews, scoping reviews, policy reports, or authoritative institutional publications.
5. Were available in English full text.

Exclusion Criteria

Sources were excluded if they:

1. Focused only on individual clinical treatment without family relevance.
2. Were duplicate publications.
3. Had insufficient methodological clarity or unreliable sources.
4. Were opinion pieces lacking substantive evidence (unless used for conceptual context).
5. Were non-English articles without accessible translation.

Screening and Data Extraction

Titles and abstracts were initially reviewed for relevance. Full texts of potentially eligible studies were then examined. Information extracted included:

- Author and year
- Country/setting
- Study design
- Family life cycle stage addressed
- Type of healthcare support discussed
- Key findings and implications

Data Synthesis

The selected literature was narratively synthesized and organized according to major stages of the family life cycle:

1. Family formation / newly married stage
2. Pregnancy and childbearing stage
3. Families with children
4. Families with adolescents
5. Launching / middle adulthood stage
6. Ageing family stage

Themes related to preventive care, chronic disease management, mental health, caregiving burden, and health system support were compared across stages.

Quality Considerations

Preference was given to systematic reviews, peer-reviewed studies, and publications from recognized organizations. Although this review was not a formal meta-analysis, efforts were made to include credible, current, and multidisciplinary evidence to ensure balanced interpretation.

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram

Identification

Records identified through database searching (n = 412)

- PubMed/MEDLINE (n = 126)
- Google Scholar (n = 178)
- Scopus/Web of Science (n = 54)
- WHO / Institutional sources (n = 32)
- Other sources / reference lists (n = 22)

Additional records identified through manual search (n = 18)

Total records identified (n = 430)

Screening

Duplicate records removed (n = 74)
 Records after duplicates removed (n = 356)
 Titles and abstracts screened (n = 356)
 Records excluded after title/abstract review (n = 241)

- Irrelevant topic
- Individual-only clinical focus
- Non-family related studies
- Incomplete records

Eligibility

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n = 115)

Full-text articles excluded (n = 79)

- Insufficient methodological quality (n = 21)
 - No family life cycle relevance (n = 28)
 - Duplicate/overlapping data (n = 14)
- Non-English / inaccessible full text (n = 16)

Included

Studies included in narrative review (n = 36)

- Original research articles (n = 18)
- Systematic / scoping reviews (n = 9)
- Policy / WHO / institutional reports (n = 5)
- Conceptual / family nursing papers (n = 4)

Results

Table 1. Health Care Support Needs Across Family Life Cycle (Word Template)

Family Life Cycle Stage	Major Health Needs	Required Health Care Support
Newly married / Beginning family	Reproductive planning, mental adjustment	Premarital counselling, contraception, mental health
Pregnancy / Childbearing	Maternal-child health	ANC, PNC, nutrition, institutional delivery
Preschool / School-age family	Child growth & development	Immunization, nutrition, school health

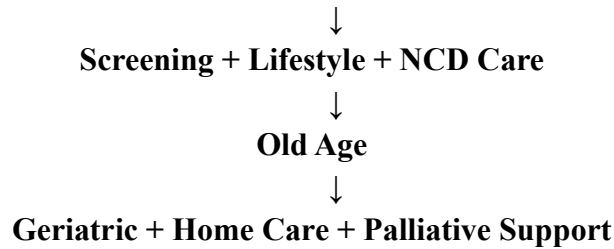
Adolescent family	Behavioural & reproductive health	Counselling, menstrual health, substance abuse prevention
Launching family	Career stress, relationship shifts	Mental health, preventive screening
Middle-aged family	NCD risk	Diabetes, hypertension, cancer screening
Ageing family	Frailty, dependency	Geriatric care, rehabilitation, palliative care

Table 2. Benefits of Family-Centred Health Care

Domain	Benefit
Prevention	Better vaccination, hygiene, nutrition
Treatment	Improved adherence and follow-up
Mental Health	Emotional resilience
Chronic Disease	Shared caregiving and monitoring
Elderly Care	Reduced institutionalization
Health System	Lower hospitalization burden

Figure 2. Support of Health Care in Family Life Cycle





Discussion

This review demonstrates that healthcare support within the family life cycle is not static but changes continuously as families move through developmental transitions. A life-cycle perspective helps shift healthcare planning from episodic disease treatment to anticipatory, preventive, and family-responsive care. Rather than viewing health needs as isolated events, it recognizes that each family stage creates predictable opportunities for intervention, risk reduction, and resilience building.

During the early family formation stage, couples often face adjustment to new social roles, financial responsibilities, reproductive decisions, and relationship expectations. Stress during this phase may influence mental wellbeing, marital stability, and future parenting capacity. Access to premarital counselling, reproductive health services, screening for hereditary disorders where relevant, and mental health support can strengthen long-term family functioning. In many settings, however, such services remain fragmented or underutilized due to stigma, lack of awareness, or limited access.

The pregnancy and childbearing stage remain one of the most health-sensitive phases in the family life cycle. Maternal nutrition, antenatal care, safe delivery, postnatal support, breastfeeding practices, and newborn care have direct consequences for two generations simultaneously. Evidence consistently shows that supportive family environments improve maternal health-seeking behaviour and child outcomes. Conversely, poor family support may contribute to delayed care, maternal stress, inadequate infant feeding, and preventable morbidity. Therefore, family-inclusive maternal and child health programs are more effective than mother-only approaches.

Families with young children and school-age members require a strong preventive orientation. Immunization, nutrition, oral hygiene, developmental surveillance, accident prevention, and school health monitoring are best sustained when parents and caregivers are actively engaged. The family setting also shapes long-term habits related to diet, physical activity, sleep, and screen use. Many adult non-communicable disease risks originate from unhealthy childhood routines established within households. Thus, child health programs should be integrated with family lifestyle education rather than limited to episodic clinic visits.

Adolescence introduces a different set of challenges requiring adaptive family support. Rapid physical, emotional, and social changes may increase vulnerability to anxiety, depression, substance use, self-harm, bullying, sexual risk behaviour, and unhealthy body image. Families remain protective when communication is open, supervision is balanced, and trust is maintained. Excessively authoritarian or disengaged family environments may worsen risk

behaviours. Healthcare systems should therefore strengthen adolescent-friendly services that involve parents appropriately while respecting confidentiality and autonomy.

In adulthood and middle age, families often experience competing pressures including employment stress, caregiving for children and ageing parents, economic obligations, and reduced self-care time. This stage coincides with rising prevalence of hypertension, diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease, and common mental disorders. Family-based approaches to screening, dietary change, smoking cessation, and physical activity can improve adherence because behaviour change is easier when household routines shift collectively. Individual counselling alone is frequently insufficient when home environments reinforce unhealthy patterns.

The ageing stage places increasing importance on family caregiving, continuity of care, and social support. Older adults may face frailty, sensory impairment, falls, dementia, polypharmacy, loneliness, and dependency in activities of daily living. Families often provide unpaid care, medication supervision, transport, financial assistance, and emotional companionship. While this support reduces institutional burden, it may generate caregiver fatigue, depression, and income loss. Health systems that ignore caregiver needs risk transferring costs to households. Respite care, caregiver training, home-based services, and community rehabilitation are therefore essential components of geriatric care.

An important analytical finding is that families are both determinants of health and providers of care. They influence risk exposure, health literacy, treatment decisions, emotional coping, and adherence. At the same time, they absorb responsibilities when formal systems are weak. Policies that overlook the family may underestimate hidden caregiving labour, especially by women, who disproportionately shoulder unpaid care work in many societies.

Contemporary demographic and social transitions complicate traditional family support models. Urban migration, smaller family size, delayed marriage, dual-income households, divorce, geographic separation, and population ageing reduce the availability of informal caregivers. In low- and middle-income countries, these transitions occur alongside persistent infectious disease burdens and limited long-term care infrastructure. As a result, families may face a “double burden” of caring for both children and older adults while managing chronic disease and economic stress.

The findings also highlight the strategic role of primary healthcare. Community health workers, family physicians, nurses, and digital health systems can identify family-stage needs early and provide continuity across generations. Examples include preconception counselling, parenting education, adolescent counselling, chronic disease follow-up, medication review for elders, and caregiver support networks. Such integrated models are likely more cost-effective than fragmented specialist care delivered only after complications develop.

Despite clear benefits, implementation barriers remain substantial. These include low health literacy, stigma around mental health and reproductive care, gender inequities, rural access gaps, workforce shortages, and poor coordination between health and social care sectors. Measuring family outcomes is also methodologically challenging, as many benefits—such as

resilience, caregiver confidence, or reduced conflict—are not routinely captured in health statistics.

This review has limitations. As a narrative synthesis, it does not provide pooled quantitative effect estimates. Included evidence comes from diverse settings with varying cultural norms and healthcare systems. Nevertheless, convergence across disciplines strongly supports a life-cycle family health approach.

Overall, the discussion suggests that future health systems should move beyond patient-centred care alone toward family-responsive care. When healthcare recognizes developmental transitions, supports caregivers, and addresses household determinants, it can improve prevention, treatment success, healthy ageing, and equity across the lifespan.

Conclusion

Support of healthcare across the family life cycle is fundamental to achieving holistic health and social wellbeing. Families are not merely passive recipients of healthcare services; they are active agents that influence health behaviours, provide caregiving, support treatment adherence, and shape emotional resilience from birth to old age. Because health needs vary across developmental stages, a uniform approach to healthcare delivery is insufficient. Instead, healthcare systems should adopt a life-cycle framework that recognizes the changing priorities of newly formed families, pregnant mothers, children, adolescents, adults, and older persons.

The evidence reviewed in this paper indicates that family-oriented healthcare can improve preventive service uptake, maternal and child outcomes, adolescent wellbeing, chronic disease control, caregiver preparedness, and healthy ageing. It can also reduce avoidable hospitalization, strengthen continuity of care, and enhance quality of life. These benefits are particularly important in settings where families remain the principal source of informal care and where health resources are limited.

Practical Implications

For healthcare practice, clinicians should routinely assess family context, caregiving capacity, social support, and household barriers when planning treatment. Primary healthcare teams should move beyond individual consultations to include counselling for families, health education for caregivers, and stage-specific risk assessment. Hospitals and community programs should strengthen family participation in discharge planning, rehabilitation, and long-term care management.

For public health systems, integrating family life-cycle support into national programs can improve efficiency and population outcomes. Maternal-child health services, school health, adolescent programs, non-communicable disease screening, geriatric care, and palliative services should be linked within a continuum of family-centred care rather than functioning in isolation.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen primary healthcare by incorporating family assessment and family counselling into routine services.

2. Promote preventive care at each life stage, including preconception care, immunization, adolescent counselling, adult screening, and geriatric assessments.
3. Support caregivers through training, respite care, mental health services, and financial or social protection measures.
4. Expand digital health tools for follow-up, teleconsultation, medication reminders, and caregiver guidance.
5. Develop multidisciplinary models involving physicians, nurses, psychologists, social workers, and community health workers.
6. Encourage policy integration so that health, education, nutrition, and social welfare sectors jointly address family wellbeing.
7. Promote research on culturally appropriate family-centred interventions and measurable outcomes across different settings.

Final Statement

In conclusion, healthcare support in the family life cycle should be recognized as a strategic investment in human development. When families are supported at the right time and in the right way, societies gain healthier children, more productive adults, dignified ageing populations, and more sustainable health systems. A family-centred life-cycle approach is therefore essential for achieving universal health coverage and long-term population health.

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