

2018

Mental Health - Family

Najma Motan
Parkland College

Recommended Citation

Motan, Najma, "Mental Health - Family" (2018). *A with Honors Projects*. 232.
<https://spark.parkland.edu/ah/232>

Open access to this Essay is brought to you by Parkland College's institutional repository, [SPARK: Scholarship at Parkland](#). For more information, please contact spark@parkland.edu.

Najma Motan

Andrew Wilk

ENG 102-203

11May 2018

Mental Health - Family

Introduction

This project is based on research and interviews concerning Family Mental Health Care, with The Pavilion Behavioral Health System, Rosecrance, Parkland College Counseling Center, and Family Service.

Preview of the Sections

The main questions discussed are as follows:

- What are the most common problems currently being treated by Family Therapists?
- What are the most unusual/surprising problems Family Therapists are being asked to treat today?
- Are the types of problems Family Therapists being asked to treat, changing over time as our society changes?
- Does the heterogeneity of American society pose any special challenges for Family Therapists?
- How have government funding policies changed overtime?
- Are there ethical or legal challenges facing Family Therapists?
- What is the credentialing required of Family Therapists?

Background

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, 43.8 million adult Americans in any given year, suffer from some type of mental disorder. Serious mental illness costs America \$193.2 billion in lost-wages per year. We, as a society, must do better to fight the stigma related to mental illnesses with compassion, education, and love ("Combat Stigma of Mental Illness").

Mental health problems, alcoholism, and drugs are all examples of diseases and should be treated as such. Just as you would not tell a cancer patient to 'shrug it off', one should not take mental illnesses lightly or give it less significance because it cannot be seen like physical ailments could be. There are a variety of problems, and the intensity of these problems varies from person to person. An issue that might be taken lightly by one individual, could have more bothersome to a second individual, and could be highly impactful for a third (Donaldson).

Common Problems with Families

The most common problem that therapists and counselors currently deal with regarding children are adjustment disorders. Other common issues are depression and anxiety among all ages. In teen-age children, inter-personal development is low and there are a lot of bullying cases. When teens are exposed to domestic violence, their physical and emotional development is impacted (Claxon).

Parents, guardians, and teachers need to be more patient with children, more open to them, and understanding of the fact that it takes time to work with children, especially those who already have some struggles in their lives. Medical practitioners should also not fall into the lure of getting 'a quick fix' and jump to medications without first trying to provide proper counseling in order to resolve the issues that have piled up for many years, which could be

causing symptoms similar to certain mental illnesses A practitioner should first look at the environment, and try to fix the problems there (Claxon). Young couples are not very loyal to each other either, which is causing all these family break-ups (Kirby).

Family dynamics, which are currently weak, need to be stronger. A good family support system understands and helps in time of need. People with mental issues are already under stress, coping and managing their daily routine. As a result, they tend to drop out of college. Some young adults start taking drugs, and others cut off communication from society and live an individualized, segregated life style. The problems regarding mental health issues and family are increasing with time. Technology also plays an enormous role in making our society sedentary and uninterested in physical activities and play (Harold).

Young and old alike need family support for a balanced, all-rounded wellbeing - both physically and mentally. Today, we do not see as many young adults who can deal effectively with stress and anxiety, as we did before. Students face a lot of pressure of working along with studying - paying bills, doing laundry, getting groceries, and cooking for themselves. All of it seems to be more than could be handled alone, especially when they are suddenly overwhelmed by other problems (Harold).

An Unusual and Surprising Challenge Today

Nature and nurture both play an important role, and they both affect each other to magnify the problem, making things worse. The most unusual and surprising challenge today is that parents -both mothers and fathers -are changing genders and thus changing their basic family roles and responsibilities, which is very stressful for their children. Youth are also reversing their gender identities, which also becomes unacceptable to parents. These people feel

that their souls are in the wrong body! These families are in turn, sometimes more stressed as a result (Donaldson).

Ms. Donaldson believes that there needs to be a longitudinal study, studying this growing trend to change biological gender. Mice were tested in labs, and it was found that the more densely populated the mice were, the more they tend to get attracted to their own gender type. It is still not known as to why; and scientists are still testing other animals to find the cause (Donaldson).

Challenges Faced by Family Therapists

Ms. Harold, who has been working as a counselor and therapist for 17 years feels that there is nothing more surprising to her than seeing that most adults are now having many problems adjusting to college due to lack of family support or other stresses in their lives. These are a lot of continuing students, who are returning after a long period of missing school. There is no doubt that adults are more stressed as they have family responsibilities as well, but they certainly have more previous experiences from their jobs or partners; and life in general. They are mature and more focused, they have their set goals; if they wanted to change their current job description or have further education, they stay focused. They don't drop out easily either, but the stressors in life are big today. The youth on the other hand, get confused and do not know how to handle the freedom they have in college after a well-monitored and guided environment of high schools. Therapists like Harold try to help these young adults, give them advice, and try their best to prevent them from dropping out (Harold).

Ms. Claxon, who is a counselor, personally suffered when she dealt with a person who had experienced human trafficking! Sometimes the mental health workers have such cases that

they require counseling themselves after interacting with severe cases. To cope they must take Employee Assistance Program (EAP) sessions when disturbed or greatly moved by a patient's situation (Claxon).

People with personality disorders are not compliant, and it's very difficult to deal with them. Some disorders like autism and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are the kind when the patient is defiant of his/her medical condition. Severely depressed patients need medications combined with talk therapy. Sometimes it happens that the therapists have to name a disease, even if the person is not completely falling into the disease category, just to get the cost of the healthcare covered by insurance companies. This leads to having a certain disorder of the month, and this month it is a bi-polar disease month (Kirby).

The generation gap has never been so big. In the recent 15 to 20 years, a lot of problems have occurred due to technology and cultural shifts, and it is quite unpredictable what will happen in the next 20 years. The millennials and the baby boomers were easily bridged; but this is not the case between the x-generation and the z-generation (Donaldson).

Technology has a disadvantage because it is important for people to have physical contact. Just a healing touch or pat on the back is sometimes all that is needed. Facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice are all absent in electronic conversations. Many a times this sort of communication is misinterpreted. People with mental problems should not feel lonely, and it is important for them to engage on a personal level with other people. It is very important for them to be told time and again that they matter, and they are important to the lives of their near and dear ones, family, and community in general. When they are offended, an apology should be made. It is very common across cultures to get offended, but a simple sorry will do the work (Harold).

Social Media has played a havoc in destroying our society's family structure, and therapists are surprised that normally decent men are breaking off their families and living in a 'fairy-tale' kind of a world, where they make friends with an artificial person and believe their fictitious assumptions, and they fly to another state to get married to them divorcing their wives and abandoning their children and family responsibilities. This is the kind of an artificial life that therapists like Kirby have never seen before in their extensive 20-year careers (Kirby).

Another growing challenge that therapists face nowadays is the increase of substance abuse due to anxiety, stress, post-traumatic conditions, or poor coping strategies. A lot of people take pain medication for very long periods of time. They even change their primary physicians often so that they can be re-prescribed a strong pain-killer or an anesthetic which is not an over the counter medication. For example, 'Fentanyl' is a rapid onset opioid which is even stronger than heroin! These people find their way of getting the drug, and escape law. They buy online, from the black-market, or even create their own drugs with the ingredients, one such example is 'crystal meth.' These patients need a proper detox program which costs \$1000 or more. Some patients have a relapse and an ongoing increase in dosage of the drug to feel the same dopamine effect. This might lead them to serious medical conditions and sudden death (Kirby).

Problems with Treating Addicts

Some facilities like Rosecrance where Ms. Claxon works don't give medications right away, even though they have two psychiatrists from Carle at their facility. They try to refer patients to Frances Nelson Health Center and Promise Healthcare, if they need further help. However, it is unfortunate that the patients have to wait for more than a month as there are long

waiting lists" (Claxton).

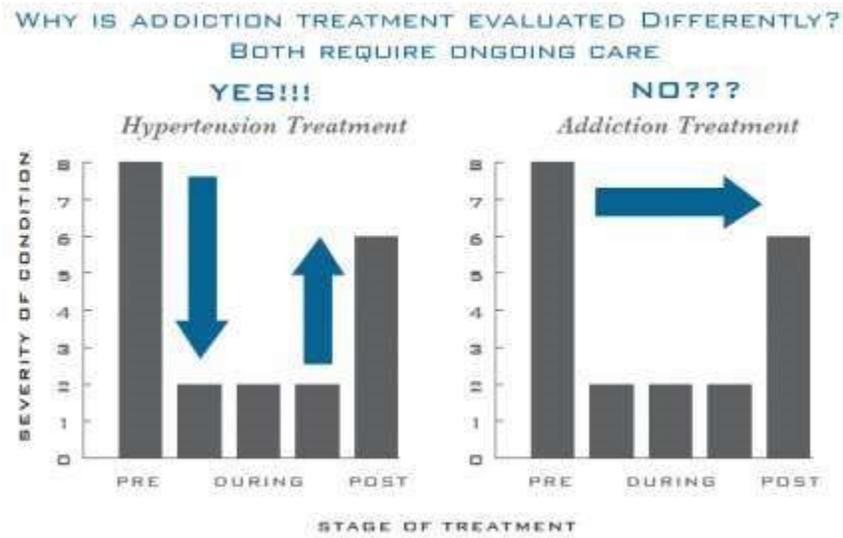
On the other hand, facilities like The Pavilion, where Ms. Donaldson works, 90% of the people who come in are already on drugs, and medications are important to these individuals. Alcoholism is a disease and should be treated seriously, 'as a disease' Before meeting with the ones in crisis, one might think it just needs a person to say one day, "I quit," and the problem is over. However, the reality is very different than that. Getting out of alcoholism and drugs is not easy, and people tend to come back and relapse even after quitting and staying away from the addiction for a long time" (Donaldson).

According to research that tracks individuals in treatment over extended periods, most people who get into and remain in treatment stop using drugs, decrease their criminal activity, and improve their occupational, social, and psychological functioning. Individual treatment outcomes depend on the extent and nature of the patient's problems, the appropriateness of treatment and related services used to address those problems, and the quality of interaction between the patient and his or her treatment providers ("How Effective Is Drug Addiction Treatment?").

Improvements are seen with medications, but after some time the patient gives up on medication because of the side effects (for e.g., dry mouth, indigestion, shaky hands), and this brings them back to 'square one.' They once again start having psychotic thoughts and other symptoms associated with the illness, for e.g. sometimes they have thoughts or even hear someone talking to them, and informing them of others hatching a conspiracy against them; which makes them anti-treatment" (Kirby).

Unfortunately, when relapse occurs many deem treatment a failure. Lapses to drug abuse do not indicate failure-rather, they signify that treatment needs to be reinstated or

adjusted, or that alternate treatment is needed ("How Effective Is Drug Addiction Treatment?").



Source: "How Effective Is Drug Addiction Treatment?"

Why Do People Avoid Mental Health Treatment?

The problems never get solved or are delayed due to the stigma attached to these illnesses. There is still stigma attached to this, and people are even cautious about not parking their cars in the front parking lot, so that their relatives could not spot their cars! Younger people are more willing to talk, and open to change, and accept their diagnosis. Whereas, older ones are just too old to change their perspective and give up. 50+ adults are more hesitant, as they say they are settled in a specific role in life, or a job and are getting along well (Kirby).

Can you imagine a world without stigma? Where a diagnosis of autism or schizophrenia didn't inevitably stick people with permanent labels of "handicap," "abnormal," "disturbed," or "dependent"? He identified three processes as drivers of what he described as the "pivotal historical moment" of the decoupling of stigma and mental illness: high-profile figures, from celebrity talk-show hosts to the Pope, speaking up about their mental illnesses instead of hiding

them; a shift from boxing identities into racial, spiritual, gender, and other categories to placing them on a spectrum; and economies learning to appreciate the unique skills of people with mental illness ("Detangling Stigma and Mental Illness").

Iskandarani quotes Grinker in her article, *Detangling Stigma and Mental Illness*, that "there's always a piece missing for all of us." and "To embrace the idea that mental illnesses are an essential feature of what it means to be human?" ("Detangling Stigma and Mental Illness").

Mental Illnesses are at an all-time high in the US right now, and is at the forefront of the discussion these days, with many stars, politicians and high status people coming out about their struggles with it. This, along with the recent numerous senseless acts of violence like the mass shootings in schools and theaters, has made mental illness, its causes, its effects and a wider discussion about it more common-place in households across the country. The mass shootings, as an example, are one of the tolls untreated mental illnesses cause, with one article stating that over 59% of mass shooting attackers had a mental illness problem (Duwe and Rocque).

New Approaches to Mental Healthcare

Evaluations have been made after incidents like shootings inside campuses, and decisions are being made to test students and give them assessment at different age levels to know beforehand who is going to be criminally involved afterwards, later in their lives. There are still red flags as to when should these be done? At age 5 or 10? Or perhaps all age levels -but that would be expensive business. What should be assessed specifically? Who should be considered, because if all are assessed, it would be very costly (Kirby).

Education is crucial; therapists provide an educational based, full day session, which is

pre-written and provide a DVD separately. The main concern in these type of class is to address major disruptive issues regarding responsibilities of both parents; may it be financial or emotional. Therapists have learnt with experience that they should not call divorced parents to the same class, even if they give reassurance that everything is okay between them. Therapists have seen arguments rise in the middle of a session, causing disruptions for all. These disruptions prove that there is a lack of communication between couples and that they do not have the ability to settle arguments on their own (Kirby).

Issues Faced Due to Multicultural Diversity

When dealing with varied cultures in the American Society, family therapists are faced with special challenges. They have to do a lot of research about the patient's culture and need to keep asking their clients questions about the things that are normal to their cultures. There are often language barriers, which gives rise to the need to arrange for an interpreter. At other times, families provide therapists with important literature needed to understand them and their problems better. Claxon once had a family that was so happy after the therapy that the mother bowed to her feet as a sign of total gratitude and a token of love according to the Indian culture. This left Claxon and everybody present in the room with her wow in astonishment and surprise (Claxon).

There is also a need to directly re-structure family dynamics. A dysfunctional person needs family help and support to rebuild the lost trust and commitment. Once they understand that the cause of the problem was their disease, and not the fault of their partner/family members, these patients need counseling to help them deal and handle the pain.

Parents who are fearful themselves of heterogeneity in our society, and have biases,

cannot raise their children to be kind to all people. Kirby believes that it is extremely important to teach kids kindness, and she herself has raised her children in a way that they be kind to all people, and accept differences in color, culture, and beliefs. Heterogeneity in the American society should not cause fear of various people, instead it should be celebrated. We should learn things from each other, and teach each other various things if needed (Kirby).

Critical issues faced by multicultural communities:

- Less access to treatment
- Less likely to receive treatment
- Poorer quality of care
- Higher levels of stigma
- Culturally insensitive health care system
- Racism, bias, homophobia or discrimination in treatment settings
- Lower rates of health insurance
- Language barriers ("Mental Health by the Numbers").

The Funding Crisis in Medical HealthCare and Its Impact

Low government funding has created greater issues in this field. The cases are growing due to social media and technology, and the incorrect use and abuse of these has greatly increased the number of problems. There are some benefits of technology as close monitoring of patients has been made possible and informative and useful data is reachable to all, but the reactiveness weighs too high. Donaldson believes that the Government should be involved in making and reviewing policies regarding the use of computers. They need to take strict steps as a communist government would take, but this is very difficult to imply because of our

capitalistic, and individualistic type of society (Donaldson).

State funding has decreased by 40%, causing many financial problems in social service activities and the amount of help they can give, which is much less than what is required for society. Residential living facilities have been closing since the 1970's and 80's. Today there are none run by the government! An estimated 26% of homeless adults staying in shelters live with serious mental illness and an estimated 46% live with severe mental illness and/or substance use disorders ("Mental Health by the Numbers").

Many homeless people can be easily spotted in public places such as parks, terminals, train stations, airports, bus stations, etc. Mostly these poor people are harmless and asking for some food or money. They are homeless and prefer to be homeless, mainly so they don't have to bear the shame from people when they are having these psychotic attacks. They use restroom in the gas stations and other public places and sleep wherever they get shelter for a few hours. Private owned shelters are there but provide very limited accommodation from say, a month to 3 months at a maximum (Kirby).

When funding is cut, it directly cuts off manpower as facilities have to lay off their staff and hire less qualified one. As Kirby explains, her facility has case managers who have a master's degree, but they also have people with bachelor's degrees who take home \$25,000 a year. There are some psychiatric hospitals, but the government usually expects the community to handle these kinds of people on a community level, and collect funds from within the community (Kirby).

Considerations Regarding as a Career In Mental HealthCare

Someone planning to work in Family Therapy should consider if they are devoted enough, are passionate and kind to work with troubled people, and know good boundaries and their limits before entering the field.

Clinical Social Workers, Licensed Professional Counselors, Mental Health Counselors, Certified Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselors, and Marital and Family Therapists all need a Master's degree and licensure to practice ("Types of Mental Health Professionals").

Some Comments by Therapists from My Interviews

Every Therapist has their own opinions regarding the field and its challenges and rewards. Some of them are listed as follows:

- "A person planning in counseling and therapy should be educated as per required by law, i.e. Master in Clinical Counseling, Master in Social Work, Masters in Forensic Psychology. A clinical licensure is required which needs to be renewed every two years. We would appreciate somebody who could do all the paper work, is good in insurance filing, and has the ability and skills to do proper management. A person working with patients should be able to 'leave work at work' and be free of any burden when at home" (Claxon).
- "All practitioners need a licensure which needs to be renewed every two years and work hours to complete to be a LMFT or CPC. Courses can be taken and tested also

be taken online nowadays. Hours of study on a continuous basis are required to be maintained" (Kirby).

- "We should never impose our ideas or advice on our patients, instead we just guide them to make better choices. We are always careful not to get too personal, or to portray ourselves to be exhausted at the time of counseling" (Claxon).
- "We try to be in their shoes, and cannot tell them, "Oh your problem is very small." Although we can spot differences when a 16-year old comes to us after separating from their partner, compared to someone who has lost a family member. But at the same time it seems big to them. We take things into relative consideration. Some events are life altering and serious in nature, others are not" (Donaldson).
- "It is a challenge to know to ask to these people, so as to be able to give them the help they need, as well as to not ask irrelevant personal questions too much. We have to use our reasoning and judgement as to what the circumstance calls for. A good therapist should never take advantage of their client. We are careful and watchful. We know our boundaries and try to be as professional as possible" (Harold).
- "It takes a couple of visits to get to the actual problem and establish the main cause of the problem. Different problems are dealt with differently, for example; someone having death crises within a family, some kind of trauma, or dealing with step parents/siblings, or divorce would be taken in an entire light as compared to a 14-year old who has broken up with a partner. We help them by setting up plans for the patients to make them do some homework, for example, give them some homework to do like activities and worksheets, teach them coping skills i.e. breathing exercises, or teach

them ways to channel their feelings and emotions in a positive manner" (Donaldson).

- "It is a challenge to know what to ask these people, as to be able to give help needed to them, and at the same time not to ask too many questions that are too personal or irrelevant. We have to use our reasoning and judgement as to what the circumstance calls for. A good therapist should never take advantage of their client. We are careful and watchful, we know our boundaries and try to be as professional as possible at all times" (Harold).
- "When dealing with and counseling, we should remain neutral and calm no matter what the client throws at us. We see people from different faiths and never try to devalue their personal practice or belief. We kind of desensitize our feelings of any negativeness from the client and always try to help them, e.g. counseling grandparents raising their grandchildren" (Kirby).

Final Thoughts

I have learnt a lot while researching for this paper, and I feel that education, diagnosis and treatment of mental health issues is vastly unrecognized and underemphasized in the American society. In the recent past, efforts have been made to this end, however, there is still a lot to be done. Individuals, society, and local and the national government should all play a part in providing much needed assistance in helping the individuals, families, and communities affected by family mental health issues.

It is now widely accepted that mental health is a common health issue our society faces and that we have to effectively deal with it in order to achieve an overall healthy individual and therefore a healthier society. Indeed, educators and scholars like Dr. Grinker believe that now we

are moving towards a society which is more accepting of mental disease as similar to physical disease and is slowly, but surely showing signs of a decrease in stigma associated with mental health issues ("Detangling Stigma and Mental Illness").

Mental health must assume its rightful place in health promotion. The significant number of evidence-based mental health programs concerned with well-being from early childhood to old age, aimed at individuals, groups or at community structural issues demonstrate that well designed interventions contribute significantly to the well-being of populations. Efforts need to be made to strengthen this evidence, particularly in developing countries. A further challenge for us to produce more in numbers, as well as for mental health professionals to become more skilled in the process of advocacy in order that such evidence is used to maximum effect in ensuring that mental health promotion is recognized as an integral and central component of health promotion.

To assume and believe in the fallacy that mental health issues will not touch us is merely an illusion, and we must work our hardest and educate and advocate for the proper and humane treatment of people who are affected by mental illness, especially in the context of Family mental health issues, to avoid the avoidable injury and harm caused by those who are not treated appropriately, who are affected by the symptoms of this vicious and understated disease. I hope that my paper helps enlighten and inform people who were previously unaware of the causes, treatments, challenges of mental health in our communities and its impact and effects on our economy and moral/societal fabric ("Detangling Stigma and Mental Illness").

Work Cited

Claxon, Carol R. "Supervisor, Rosecrance." 25 Apr. 2018

Combat Stigma of Mental Illness."News, Sports, Jobs - Marietta Times,
www.mariettatimes.com/opinion/local-columns/2018/05/combat-stigma-of-mental-illness/.

"Detangling Stigma and Mental Illness." Duke Research Blog - Following the People and Events That Make up the Research Community at Duke.
www.researchblog.duke.edu/2018/04/18/detangling-stigma-and-mental-illness/

Donaldson, Kristine R. "Director of Assessment, The Pavilion." 20 Apr. 2018

Duwe, Grant and Rocque, Michael. "Actually, There Is a Clear Link between Mass Shootings and Mental Illness." *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles Times, 23 Feb. 2018,
www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-duwe-rocque-mass-shootings-mental-illness-20180223-stort.html.

Harold, Donna Tanner, "Counseling and Advising, Parkland College." 18 Apr. 2018

Kirby Alice, "Program Director, Family Service." 24 Apr. 2018

"Mental Health By The Numbers."NAMI, www.nami.org/learn-more/mental-health-by-the-numbers

National Institute on Drug Abuse. "How Effective Is Drug Addiction Treatment?" *NIDA*,
www.drugabuse.gov/publications/principles-drug-addiction-treatment-research-based-guide-third-edition/frequently-asked-questions/how-effective-drug-addiction-treatment.

"The State of Mental Health in America." Mental Health America, 18 Dec. 2017, www.mentalhealthamerica.net/issues/state-mental-health-america.