Family-Farm Therapy: An Urban Therapy Clinic to Address The Multifaceted Needs of Multi-Stressed Families and their Surrounding Communities

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Repository Citation
https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/grad_symposium/2014/april_21/7
Multi-stressed Families

Multi-stressed is a term that is given to refer to families that are experiencing difficult realities in their lives, yet have the capabilities to address those stresses (Madsen, 2007) even if they are unaware of themselves. It is a purposeful attempt to redefine and to maximize the positive effects of language. Multi-stressed families have been labeled many ways based on judgments and interactions others have with such families:

- Dysfunctional
- High risk
- Highly resistant
- Non-compliant

Family-Farm Therapy: An Urban Therapy Clinic to Address The Multifaceted Needs of Multi-stressed Families and their Surrounding Communities

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Significance

The Family-Farming Therapy approach is innovative and unique in its holistic delivery and systemic application of Marriage and Family Therapy because it addresses the multifaceted needs of the family, and simultaneously establishes a relationship of not just the individual or family members, but the relationships between them, their community, and the environment.

Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) focuses on the relationships of individuals within a family system. The farm is in essence the reflection of the family. If the farm is not doing well, then improvements constructed on the values, cohesion, stability, and commitment of the family (Calus & Van Huylenbroeck & Hennon, 2005).

Family-Farming Therapy utilizes a holistic approach within the families community to resolve some of these issues:

- Physical health difficulties or disabilities
- Homelessness
- Poverty
- Long-term unemployment
- Immigration status
- Offender status
- Mental health difficulties
- Domestic violence
- Justice system and social system involvement
- Physical health difficulties or disabilities
- Educational and learning obstacles

Experiences that reinforce the belief that assistance outside the family is a threat (Davey & Watson; 2008; Griner & Smith 2006):

- Negative experiences with justice and social systems
- Fear of judgment
- Cultural differences
- Exclusion from the community

Socio-economic hurdles faced by the family’s ability to adjust to changes and crisis in their family structure. Family-Farming Therapy, by its design, will directly address some of these hurdles:

- Physical health-nutrition, exercise, fresh air
- Economic skills: job training, referral, networking, assistance with social service agencies
- Social health-volunteerism, positive community interaction, positive family connection and experiences
- Mental health-family therapy, individual therapy, group therapy, connection to the natural environment

Circular effects of multi-stressed families and their community:

- Families can feel that they cannot participate in community relationships and activities. They may have difficulty sustaining employment and may not have an adequate support system (O’Reihan et al. 2011).
- Families may truly be experiencing rejection from the community. With higher numbers of multi-stressed families comes higher levels of stigma and rejection by its youth regardless of whether the youths were from multi-stressed families or not (Hoffmann 2006).
- Volunteering can increase opportunities to increase social capital, change community perceptions of marginalized families, and increase community social support networks.

Family, Farming, and Community

Farming around the world has traditionally been a family endeavor which makes it a unique environment to be used as a metaphor for family systems. Interactions, behaviors, and structure. Farming also offers economic sustenance, increased physical health, and community acceptance. The family farm is constructed on the values, cohesion, stability, and commitment of the family (Calus & Van Huylenbroeck & Hennon, 2010). The farm is in essence the reflection of the family. If the farm is not doing well, then improvements must be made. Farming improvements involve risk. Families experiencing crisis may feel that they, too, are at risk. Multi-stressed families are present in all farm systems (i.e. Yeomen) and non-farm family systems share similarities (Hildenbrand & Hennon, 2005), however, multi-stressed families may be experiencing difficulties, disconnections, or feel unaccepted in some of these areas:

- Similar goals: continuity, viability, and to produce a productive members
- Management strategies: Each unique system knows what works for them, each member affects the whole system, and each member is a vital part of the system
- Family Characteristics: Intergenerational cooperation, investment in the success of the members, membership is defined by the members within the system, parental responsibility, and community support
- Local Implications: Closely knit social networks, investment in their community and their community is invested in the family, and family and community are economically connected and value the success of one another.

Family-Farming Therapy utilizes a holistic approach within the families community to resolve some of these difficulties and disconnections, and to reconnect the family and community.

Experiential Therapy Applications

Experiential therapeutic approaches have proven to be quite effective within the populations they are structured to serve. This literature review will explore such experiential therapeutic approaches that have demonstrated effective practices, referred to as effective practices (Green & Riebold, 2010). Approaches include:

Nature Therapy (NT) takes therapy out of the office and into nature. Nature has predictable and uncontrollable elements, such as wind and weather, that are all part of the healing process and by recognizing that a relationship exists between them and the environment, and then identifying the benefits of having a relationship with nature, the family may become invested in caring for nature and their community.

Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) utilizes animals as therapeutic agents in the therapeutic process. AAT interventions are most commonly (89%) used to strengthen the therapeutic relationship (O’Callaghan & Chandler 2011). AAT interventions have demonstrated outcomes that decrease depression, anxiety, and maladaptive behaviors, increased self-esteem and positive social behaviors, and overall improvement in psychophysiological health and healing.

Equine-Assisted Therapy (EAT) utilizes horses in the therapeutic process to assist in achieving the desired outcomes of therapy. EAC has been proven effective with all ages and backgrounds, as well as with abuse victims and offenders. EAC and a traditional school setting counseling had equal successes in increasing positive and reducing negative behaviors in at risk children. Parental reports identified twelve positive behavior improvements with EAC participants versus one in traditional settings (Trotter et al. 2008). EAC interventions have demonstrated outcomes that increase self-esteem, personal growth, improved interpersonal relationships, participation, and regular cooperation, increase empowerment, control, self-confidence, and good risk taking, and decrease maladaptive and increase positive behaviors. EAC has also been used to address the multifaceted needs of individuals who have experienced domestic violence.

Family-Farming Therapy is still being developed and published will be sought when it is complete. I anticipate it to be late 2014. The therapy is encompassed to assist in the community as well as working needs for FFT might be implemented. At that time research can be done on the successes and limitations of this therapy application. I am working to develop metaphors and experimental interventions that could be used with the families at the FFT site.

Example of an FFT intervention: Coping mechanisms and adaptation skills that may have served a family well at one time or in one environment, may later become problematic due to life transitions, member development, context, family dynamic, environment change, etc. The intervention utilizes a seed as a metaphor for an individual into direct involvement in the planting and care of a seed.

1. Member development: The seed is planted and kept indoors. Once grown enough to be planted outside, the tubes are placed into the ground and watered. Over time the plants grow in their changing environment.
2. Environmental context: The seed is not flexible or deteriorates. The seed that is planted must be able to grow and produce, and fulfill its purpose because its encasing dissolves and adapts.

Family, Farming, and Community

Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) focuses on the relationships of individuals within a family system. Experiential Therapy (ET) focuses on the connections to include the individuals and their relationship with the ecological environment. Ecology and MFT theory share common principles and concepts such as sustainability, circularity, reciprocity, and recursion (Blumer, Hertlein & Fife 2012). Both MFT and ET operate from a systemic lens focusing on the interaction between the human and their environment.

Art Therapy (Art) has also been successful at alleviating depression in a variety of populations ranging from veterans to children (McCarthy 2007). Art has demonstrated outcomes that increase productive expression of address and loss, decrease a negative states and increase positive ones, and increase social opportunities.

Future of Family-Farm Therapy

Further information:

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