



Information sheet

Research

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Systemic therapy developed through working with families to resolve problems of relationships and of psychological disturbance. As its applications have expanded it has been found to have many benefits that go well beyond its effectiveness as a treatment. Research clearly demonstrates the potential benefits of family-inclusive systemic therapy and practice to family members and to the staff supporting them. These benefits include:

- **Improved outcomes:** helping children, young people, adults, couples and families struggling with a broad range of difficulties and circumstances. From relatively commonplace mental health and relational problems to extremely serious difficulties, reducing risk of problems affecting other family members, or cascading through generations, relationship networks and communities ¹.
 - A compilation of 20 meta-analyses concluded 'marriage and family therapy [the US term for Family Therapy] is now an empirically supported therapy in the plain English sense of the phrase - it clearly works, both in general and for a variety of specific problems.' ²
 - **Value for money, including dramatic reductions in health care use among previously 'high utilisers'**. In a recently published large-scale US study ³, frequent health service users who participated in family inclusive therapy showed significant reductions of 68% for health screening visits, 38% for illness visits, 56% for laboratory/X-ray visits, and 78% for urgent care visits. In many cases the greatest reduction in use of health services was for the partner of the referred person.
 - **Improved client engagement with other therapies and interventions** occur when they are combined with systemic family therapy in multi-disciplinary working ⁴
 - **Lower client drop out rates.** Comparison trials regularly show that clients are more likely to stay in family therapy until the end of treatment than is the case with other therapies, such as CBT ⁵
 - **Reductions in relapse and readmission.** Significant reductions are found to occur for people experiencing serious mental health and other difficulties ⁶
 - **Resolution of common problems in service delivery.** Seeing parents and children together bridges gaps between child and adult services. Systemically trained practitioners are skilled in co-ordinating and facilitating multi-disciplinary networks across health, social care, education and other sectors when this is what the family needs. ⁷
 - **Higher job satisfaction, confidence, and reduced burn-out and staff turnover** Such changes have been found among professionals working in demanding areas ⁸
 - **Practice skills and understandings supporting families and staff teams, multi-disciplinary working and 'service user' involvement, across sectors** ⁹.
- list overleaf Reference

AFT is the UK's leading body for professionals working therapeutically with families.

Visit www.aft.org.uk

References

¹ For overviews of research please see

Stratton (2010) *Report on the Evidence Base for Family Therapy*. Association for Family Therapy. www.aft.org.uk

AFT (2009) *Family Therapy in the UK* www.aft.org.uk

AFT (2009) *Current Practice, Future Possibilities*. www.aft.org.uk

For a summary of NICE guidelines recommending family therapy and family interventions, see

Summary of family interventions recommended and reviewed in NICE guidelines, www.aft.org.uk

See also

Sydow, K. v., Beher, S., Schweitzer, J. & Retzlaff, R. (2010). The efficacy of systemic therapy with adult patients: A meta-content analysis of 38 randomized controlled trials. *Family Process*, **49**, 457-485.

² Shadish, W. R., & Baldwin, S. A. (2003). Meta-analysis of MFT interventions. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, **29**, 547.

³ Crane D.R. & Christenson, J.D. (2008) The Medical Offset Effect: Patterns in Outpatient Services Reduction for High Utilizers of Health Care. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, **30**, 217-138

⁴ Carr, A (2009a) The effectiveness of family therapy and systemic interventions for child-focused problems. *Journal of Family Therapy*, **31**, 3-45.

Carr, A (2009b) The effectiveness of family therapy and systemic interventions for adult-focused problems. *Journal of Family Therapy*, **31**, 46-74

⁵ Leff, J., Vearnals, S., Brewin, C. R., Wolff, G., Alexander, B., Asen, E., Dayson, D., Jones, E., Chisholm, D. and Everitt, B. (2000). "The London Depression Intervention Trial: Randomised controlled trial of antidepressants v. couple therapy in the treatment and maintenance of people with depression living with a partner: clinical outcome and costs". *British Journal of Psychiatry*, **177**, 95-100

⁶ Sydow, K., Beher, S., Schweitzer, J. & Retzlaff, R. (2010). The efficacy of systemic therapy with adult patients: A meta-content analysis of 38 randomized controlled trials. *Family Process*, **49**, 457-485.

⁷ AFT (2009) *Current Practice, Future Possibilities*. www.aft.org.uk

Brooker, C and Brabban, A (2004) *Measured success: a scoping review of evaluated psychosocial interventions training for work with people with serious mental health problems* NIMHE/Trent WDC

⁸ Burbach, F. and Stanbridge, R., (2006) Somerset's family interventions in psychosis service: an update, *Journal of Family Therapy*, **28**: 39-57;

Brennan, G. and Gamble, C. (1997) Schizophrenia, family work and clinical practice, *Mental Health Nursing*, **7**: 12-15

⁹ See, for example,

Stanbridge, R.I. and Burbach, F.R. (2007) Developing Family Inclusive Mainstream Mental Health Services. *Journal of Family Therapy*, **29**, 21-44.

Stanbridge, R. and Burbach, F. (2007) Involving carers Part 1: Including carers in staff training and service development in Somerset, U.K. Chapter 5 in: *Families as Partners In Care: A Guidebook for Implementing Family Work*. Toronto: Worldwide Fellowship for Schizophrenia and Allied Disorders.

Burbach, F. and Stanbridge, R. (2008) Training to develop family inclusive routine practice and specialist family interventions in Somerset. *Journal of Mental Health Workforce Development*, **3** 23-31.

Stanbridge, R.I., Burbach, F.R., and Leftwich, S. (2009) Establishing family inclusive acute inpatient mental health services: a staff training programme in Somerset. *Journal of Family Therapy*, **31** 1-17.

For information on systemic practice in social care see, for example, resources from Reclaiming Social Work, London Borough of Hackney, including

Clinical Manual – <http://www.hackney.gov.uk/rsw-clinical-manual-2008.pdf>

The Way We Do Things Here – <http://www.hackney.gov.uk/rsw-way-we-do-things-2008.pdf>

Reclaim Social Work – <http://www.hackney.gov.uk/rsw-november-2008.pdf>

For information on systemic practice in schools-based family interventions see, for example,

<http://www.cnwl.nhs.uk/marlboroughfamilyservice.html> and <http://www.cnwl.nhs.uk/mfseducation.html>