

# THE HISTORY OF FAMILY THERAPY

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## Abstract

To begin with, before taking a closely look at the history of family therapy, I shall bring some explanations of the term "Family Therapy" in terms of its definition, aims, benefits and so on so forth. After that, I will be taking into account both the differences and similarities between family therapy and group counseling at the same time. This can enhance our understanding towards getting into the explanation of the history of family therapy better.

By just taking a moment and before jumping in to get to know the meaning of family therapy, the word 'family' really caught my attention. Perhaps we can take a moment to find out what defines family first. According to Webster's Dictionary, family defines as a group of people who are bound by philosophical, religious or other convictions, common ancestry and people who are living under the same roof. Other definition of family would be a basic biosocial unit in society having as its nucleus two or more adults living together and cooperating in the care and rearing of their own or adopted children. Family is also considered as a system in which each member has a significant influence on all other members.

## FAMILY THERAPY

"Family Therapy" can also be called as "Family Counseling" which has its own definition and means of explanation. It is always the best to look at the definition or meaning of each term in this essay before further do. Family Therapy or Family Counseling is a form of counseling that includes the whole or entire family. In other words, it focuses on the problems that affect the family as a whole. Not only that, it also focuses on the problems that affect individual family members. Other than that, we must know that family therapy is designed to operate on the belief that a family unit is a system that works as a whole, with each of the member playing their own roles. As for example, the role of a father in the family is actually well known as the "breadwinner" or simply means as the head of household. In other words, role as a father can be good examples of faith and right living on the straight path of Islam. Talking about having the role as a father actually explains that patriarchal family is the most common type of Muslim family as well as in the Islamic perspective. This argument is reflected in the hadith that says:

***"Then you have obligations to Allah, to yourself, and your family. Hence, give each obligations its worth" – Al Bukhari.***

Different from the view or perspective of the western culture, although this patriarchal culture places men in such a dominant position over women, it does actually be viewed as oppressive and it does have important influences in helping families deal with crises. This can be illustrated in the example of patriarchal unit plays a critical role in strengthening family ties, support system for family members and clearly defining family roles like what has been mentioned earlier.

Furthermore, family therapy has its own purposes and aims. It is designed because family therapy attempts or tries to help any families to resolve conflict that had occur within the unit and become aware of certain dynamics that developed. These dynamics will then be considered as part of the sources of power struggles and tension.

All in all, family therapy can be considered as a very active type of therapy. The reason is because it focuses on each and individual in the family members and work on the conflict and problems as a whole and looking it at a larger scale.

Going on a deeper explanation about family therapy, Murray Bowen did some explanation on the development of family system therapy. He believed that individuals are inseparable from their network of relationships. Bowen was one of the psychoanalysts who was interested in creating more scientific and objective treatment processes as an alternative to conventional diagnostic frameworks. Bowen also believed that all therapists experienced challenges within their family of origin and that this awareness could help therapists normalize human behavior for their clients.

### **FAMILY THERAPY APPROACHES**

Before jumping into the more explanation of the history of family therapy, we shall look at some of the approaches in the system of family therapy approaches. It falls into several categories such as structural family therapy, strategic family therapy and as well as intergenerational family therapy. These three categories of family therapy approaches determine a different view.

First, we look at the structural family therapy. This was designed by Salvador Minuchin. He explains the family relationships, behaviors and patterns as they are showed within the session in order to evaluate the structure of the family. According to this approach, the therapists or counselors also examine subsystems within the family structure, such as in parental subsystem or siblings subsystems. Based on Minuchin's approach, he would employ activities like role-playing in a therapy session.

Secondly, strategic family therapy was developed by three prominent psychotherapists such as Haley, Erickson and Madanes. So, this type of theory examines family processes and functions, such as communication or problem-solving patterns, by evaluating family behavior outside the therapy session. In addition, this approach explains that therapeutic techniques may include reframing or redefining a problem scenario or using paradoxical intervention which

means those that suggest the family take action that appears to be in opposition to their therapeutic goals in order to create the desired change.

Thirdly, intergenerational family therapy was designed by Murray Brown. It acknowledges generational influences on family and individual behavior. By identifying multigenerational behavioral patterns, such as tackling and managing social anxiety, can help people see that their current problems may be rooted in previous generations. So, Bowen used it in treatment for individuals, couples as well as families.

### **ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF FAMILY THERAPY**

Speaking of the advantages or benefits of family therapy, it is way better to split it into several categories such as in terms of the family therapist and the reason on why is it done. First is about the family therapist. Family counseling or therapy is provided with license marriage and family therapist or LMFT for short. Looking at the responsibilities and jobs of family therapist can actually states the benefits of family therapy. Family therapist teaches how family function in general. Also, they help the families to focus less on the member who has been identified as ill. Instead, the family therapist will shift the focus by concentrating more on the family as a whole. In addition, they also help to identify conflicts and anxieties and help the family develop their own strategies to provide resolutions towards their problem. Not only that, the job of family therapists is also to strengthen all family members so they can work on their problems together. This is because during the therapy session, the strengths of the family are used to help them handle their problems. All members take their own responsibility for the problems. Some family members may need to change their behavior more than other people in family members. The last part on the family therapist is that they teach ways to handle conflicts and changes within the family in such a different way. Sometimes the way family members handle problems makes them more likely to develop symptoms.

At a different point of view, by looking at the reasons of why family therapy is done can actually trigger the benefits or advantages of doing family therapy. This is because anyone who has a condition or facing a situation that interferes with his or her life as well as the lives of their family members may benefit from family therapy. It is usually connoted that the better the family functions, the lower the stress level for the person with the health problem. It is also important to consider that family therapy has been used successfully to treat many different types of families in many different situations, including those in which experiencing parents who have conflict within their relationship, a child who has behavior or school problems, children or teenagers who have problems in getting along with each other and whatnots.

Nevertheless, family therapy can also be useful before the problems actually occur and begin. Some families seek this type of therapy when they anticipate a major change in their lives. Take for example, a man and woman who are both have children from previous marriages may go to family therapy when they are getting married. The purpose is to help all family members learn on how to live together and especially living with acceptance, peace and harmony.

However, I came to think about the risks or simply what we called as disadvantages of family therapy that are very important for us to take into consideration. There are such as problems may arise in family therapy or counseling which overtime the problems arise will get worse if it is not guided and lead appropriately by a well-trained counselor or therapist. Not only that, we also need to take into account that the therapy may not be sufficiently resolve issues if it is stopped too soon. Also, family therapy may be less effective if one family member refuses to participate or join in the discussion.

## **GROUP COUNSELING**

If we look at the word “Group counseling” itself, it has a broader scope which everyone probably should have an idea of what it is about. Group counseling is also a form of counseling that involves a group of people and trained counseling staffs that meet on a weekly basis and talk about different struggles and problems of individual members of the group. Oftentimes, this form of counseling focuses on specific problem or struggle.

Like family therapy, group counseling also have its own aims and purposes. Group counseling is effective for developing social skills, learning how to relate to others, feeling accepted and offering support and motivation to others especially within the group members.

## **DIFFERENCES BETWEEN FAMILY THERAPY AND GROUP COUNSELING**

There are many differences between these two terms of family therapy and group counseling. After all the definitions for these two terms, we might also need to consider the differences between family therapy or counseling and group counseling. As we know, family therapy focuses on family unit and ways to make each of the members in the family stronger and cohesive. However, in group counseling, it only brings several numbers of people together who are mostly strangers and not knowing each other (Azizi, et.al, 2010). What is more, family therapy only focuses at the specific problems that occur. On the flip side of the coin, group counseling is more into focusing on various and different problems within the group.

## **SIMILARITIES BETWEEN FAMILY THERAPY AND GROUP COUNSELING**

Despite having those differences between family therapy and group counseling, there are also several similarities. Both of these forms of counseling are designed and operated to treat individual problems with working in a group atmosphere and both are effective in treating several people at one time (Azizi. Et.al, 2007). In both family therapy and group counseling sessions, individuals are encouraged to express their feelings and learn how others would perceived them, as well as to provide encouragement and help to other individuals attending the counseling session.

## **HISTORY OF FAMILY THERAPY**

The practice of treating psychological problems in the context of the family did not actually begin until the middle of 1950s. However, the developmental roots of family therapy were founded much earlier in social and theoretical changes and developments in the field of psychology.

According to Nichols & Schwartz, family therapy changed the paradigm of psychoanalysis and the medical psychiatric model as patients' treatment needs seemed to go beyond the psychoanalytic workroom. However, today more contemporary cultural influences such as managed health care have favored the usually quicker approach of treating the entire family as opposed to each individual member.

Furthermore the earliest approaches to psychotherapy prevalent in the 20th Century focused on individual therapy and the patient-therapist relationship as the best way to treat psychological problems. Leading therapists such as Freud and Rogers believed that while family life does shape one's personality, the most influential and dominant forces controlling human behavior were the internal, subjective beliefs that patients had about their families. Freud and Rogers believed that psychological problems were the result of neurotic conflicts and destructive interactions in one's family of origin and that treatment would be most effective if conducted in isolation from the harmful influences of relatives. Therefore, patients were segregated from their families for therapy and treatment focused on their individual symptomatic behaviors.

Moreover, the beginning of family therapy ushered in a whole new way of understanding and explaining human behavior. Family therapists proposed that psychological problems were developed and maintained in the social context of the family( Azizi, et.al,2009). This new contextual perspective relocated the responsibility for the problems and the focus of treatment from the internal world of the individual to the entire or whole family. This shift and change in understanding human events in terms of interactional patterns of behavior also called for a new way to explain of what we called as the existence of emotional distress.

In order to explain and understand the history of family therapy, there are several concepts and movements in the field of psychology that needs to be addressed whereby it influenced the evolution of family therapy and shifted the view of life and problems from an individual to a systemic perspective. Among the most instrumental events were studies of small group dynamics, the child guidance movement, social work practices, research on family dynamics and the etiology of schizophrenia, and marriage counseling.

In the history of family therapy or counseling, social psychologists studied small group dynamics in the 1920's to enhance their understanding of political problems and group structure and boundaries. According to Kurt Lewin's research, a group is more than the sum of its parts and suggested that group discussions were more effective then lecturing in changing behavior and ideas. Furthermore, because interdependence among group members seemed to stabilize maladaptive patterns of behavior, changes in group behavior were brought about only after disrupting the group's accepted habits and beliefs. The principles of group dynamics are highly relevant to family therapists who must not only work with individuals, but with entire family systems.

Moving on to explain the history of family therapy, there are two of the most important concepts of small group dynamics that influence family therapy. There were namely the distinctions or differences between the process and content of group discussions, and also role theory. Nevertheless, therapists recognized that need to understand not just what the group members said as in the content of the communication but how these ideas were communicated or in other words, how the ideas are being processed. By focusing on the process of their discussions, therapists can help families improve the way they relate and thus enhance their own capacity to deal with the content of their problems and finally will be able to process it on their own.

Different approach by Virginia Satir whereby she expanded on the concept of how individuals behave and communicate in groups by describing several family roles that can serve to stabilize expected characteristic behavior patterns in a family. For example, if one child is a troubled "rebel child," a sibling may take on the role of the "good child" to lessen some of the stress in the family. This concept of role reciprocity is helpful to understanding family dynamics because of the complementary nature of roles makes behaviors more resistant to change. All in all, Satir's view on the nature of people are when people are rational and have ability to make choices, Satir had a positive view of human nature where self-esteem and effective communication are both very important, she also believed that behavior is directly related to one's family position and last but not least Satir believed that people need a higher degree of their self-esteem to be a good marriage partner.

Some of the history of family therapy has been used until today. This can be explained more by looking into several other aspects of group dynamics contributed to the treatment approaches developed in family therapy, some of which are still used today. These include such as acting out family conflicts with the group instead of discussing them; and instructing individual group members to imagine that the group is their family of origin, with the intention of enabling group members to allow unresolved family and emotional issues to surface and be dealt more objectively. All of these applications of group dynamics to family therapy involved shifting the focus of treatment from individuals to the group itself, and involved a growing understanding of themes and dynamics common to all members. By means of explanation, the word dynamic really give us insight understanding on how it holds and plays important role in a group or even in family. Without knowing the dynamics, the process of knowing each other in the group is much harder and it will never get easier.

Back again to give more explanations on the overview of history of family therapy is when the child guidance movement was also highly influential in the history of family therapy. Child guidance clinics were established on the idea that psychological problems begin in childhood and early intervention is the best way to prevent the future occurrence of mental illness. At first, child guidance clinics treated children and parents separately; the family was viewed as an extension of the child. However, it became apparent and fundamental that treating the child did not make the family's problems go away. John Bowlby who was the child guidance worker eventually determined that a child's symptoms were usually a function of emotional distress in the family.

Bowlby began the shift of transition or changes from individual to family therapy by facilitating communication between parents and children in conjoint interviews.

Furthermore, the evolution of family therapy was actually resulting from the significant or important contributions came from the field of social work. Social workers often visited clients in their homes and were trained to interview each individual family member to gain as complete an understanding of the family's problems as possible. Many family therapists entered the field of family therapy after being trained as social workers, and their family-oriented training model undoubtedly shaped the ideas they brought to the developing field of family therapy.

We already heard from Satir and Bowlby that came with their perspectives especially when viewing the history of family therapy. Now, a different name shall come up that will shape the family therapy more detailed in its own. Gregory Bateson was the leading figure in the schizophrenia research project in Palo Alto, California, which had a strong impact in shaping the course of family therapy. Along with Jay Haley, John Weakland, William Fry, and Don Jackson, Bateson developed a theory of communication to explain the development of schizophrenic behavior within the family environment. The group hypothesized that symptoms of schizophrenia function to maintain a homeostatic or homeostasis which explains balance in families, and must therefore be a result of interactions among family members.

In 1956, Bateson and his colleagues introduced the concept of the double bind to describe how schizophrenic symptoms could be explained in the context of families. While many of these assumptions about the family's role in schizophrenia later proved to be wrong or incorrect, the group's research was a foundation for the developing field of family therapy. The Palo Alto group research project resulted in some of the earliest observations of communication and organization among family members.

In responds to what Bateson did, Theodore Lidz's did investigate the family dynamics of schizophrenia which was introduced as a new element to the earlier studies conducted by the Palo Alto group. Whereas previous efforts to understand the role of the family had focused on mothers' relationships to their children, Lidz discovered that fathers too had a profound (though often unfortunate) influence on the development of symptoms in their children. Lidz found that a large proportion of schizophrenic patients in his studies came from broken homes and broken families who experienced destructive relationships with their families, particularly with their fathers. He also observed that the parental marital relationships often did not function as a cooperative unit. Lidz's studies of family dynamics and the interactional patterns that may contribute to symptomatic behavior also helped pave the way for family therapy.

Professional marriage counseling is another area of research and clinical practice that contributed to the development of family therapy. The first institutes for marriage counseling were established in the early 1930's as clinicians recognized the advantages and efficiency of treating married couples in conjoint sessions. By having a conjoint session or interview is actually having both parties to attend in the same discussion and process everything together, for instance as a husband and wife. This growing appreciation for patterns of relationships in families

led to numerous studies on marital conflict and dynamics and the effects on children's development.

As presented earlier in this report, the structural or framework of the history family therapy was based on the anthropological and sociological work in the 1950s. So, in the early 1950s in New York, child psychoanalyst Nathan Ackerman began to use family interviews in his analytic work with families. Ackerman (1958) was one who theorized that family problems reflected both the individual psyche and environmental issues. Furthermore, not only was a symptomatic family member reflecting an underlying family disturbance in the family system, but that intra-psycho conflict was being manifested in the family system. In many ways Ackerman's work challenged what he felt was the undue emphasis on the research on schizophrenia and its causes. He thought that researchers and clinicians needed to look at the non-psychiatric disorders in children as they relate to the family interactions (Ackerman, 1966). Ackerman could not fully move beyond his psychoanalytic orientation, which caused him to maintain his attention on the individual within the family. Yet his work demonstrated that he gave attention to the recursive interaction between a patient's intra-psycho world and the family's interactional and relationship patterns. Therefore, Ackerman considered that interpersonal conflicts might be an expression of unconscious elements operating within the family system.

Furthermore, a psychologist like John Bell (1961), he was one of the first clinicians to see families conjointly. He integrated group dynamics and group psychotherapy as the conceptual foundations for family therapy. In one of the classics in the field of family therapy, *Family Group Therapy*, Bell described families as small groups. In doing so, he gave attention to the structure, process, and function of families in terms of those roles that allow them to handle interfamilial issues. Though he borrowed from group therapy and small group theory Bell did recognize the difference between stranger groups and family groups. As groups have a temporary life together, families have a level of emotional bonding that has a history. In using group theory as his conceptual frame of reference Bell did view family members as individual group members rather than a part of an interactional relationship system.

In terms of symbolic experiential approach, Whitaker, who was originally trained in obstetrics before moving to psychiatry and psychoanalysis, worked with schizophrenic patients and families, children, and child guidance clinics. Whitaker is considered by many as being quite a theoretical, but he was well known for his symbolic or experiential approach. His approach is described as existential (Luepnitz, 1988) in that he was not focused on symptoms as such but he viewed symptoms as symbolic of some of the existential contingences of life, the processes of life and death. Not being psychoanalytical in his overall theoretical orientation, though he studied under Melanie Klein and Carl Jung, Whitaker viewed family symptoms as symbolic expressions of often-unconscious elements operating within family life. These elements reflected the struggle for individual autonomy and family cohesion. In many ways, Whitaker saw therapy as individual autonomy and family cohesion. In many ways, Whitaker saw therapy as growth process. Forsaking the rather disciplined and methodical approach of psychoanalysis Whitaker was much more spontaneous and intuitive and a provocateur in terms of technique. His approach was highly interactional, flexible, engaging, and creative.



## **FAMILY THERAPY IN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE**

I would like to put some Islamic elements in the family therapy. In other words, despite knowing the western perspectives, it is also interesting to have been always looking at different point of view; in this case the view of Islam about family therapy.

I have come across a good article that says about the mindset of someone. That particular mindset is about "InshaaaAllah". As a muslim, we always have to believe that everything happens for a reason and everything happens as Allah wills it. By other means of explanation, the client must believe that one must accept life as it is for all things are under God's control. Sp, Hedayat-Diba (2000), supports the "InshaaaAllah mindset" and at the same time argues the tendency to resign oneself to God's care can also lead individuals to neglect or deny symptoms they may be experiencing. Thus, a client may feel helpless and unable to make changes that would benefit him or her. The therapist may then ask the client about the concept of free will and self-determination. As according to Ali (2002), for even in the Qur'an, Allah says:

***"God does not change people until they change themselves"***

Speaking of changes, there is also a saying in the Qur'an that a small change is all that is necessary. The client is able to make few and small changes, then it is already more than worth it rather than to have nothing at all. Allah tells us that:

***"in whatever you are occupied when you recite the Qur'an, and in any other work you may be doing, we are a witness to your actions and even the smallest things that you do, do not go unrecorded" (Qur'an 10: 61).***

Thus, even a small action can have major impact on the individual self, others, society, and the world. So if Islam is a prescription for internal and external peace, then change comes about (to paraphrase Edward Lorenz's "butterfly effect" through active application and not benign neglect.)

The solution approach is marked by a more collaborative stance between the therapist and the family. Family problems are not seen as a sign of failure. In fact problem-saturated narrations of the problem are deliberately ignored (de Shazer, 1985). The focus of the therapist-family collaboration is on discussing patterns for previously attempted solutions. Focusing on the times when the problem or symptom is less or not present allows the therapist with the client to design interventions around the exceptions. It is these "exceptions" that form the basis for a solution. As the solution patterns are amplified the problem patterns can recede into the background.

The solution focused therapist's approach is that no matter how complex and difficult the situation, making only a small change in one person's behavior can lead to profound and far-reaching differences in the behavior of all persons involved. This approach applies the same Qur'anic principle that "a small change is all that is necessary."

## CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, as we describe family therapy we can say that the framework for family therapy is directed by thinking of “family as context” informed by the belief systems wherein the family is a special social environment conceptualized as consisting of multiple systems. A family is more than the sum of its individual parts; it is a unique system with particular responsibilities and functions, and changes within the family system affect all family members.

Martin Luther King, Jr. quoted:

***“Life is interrelated. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality; tied in the single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”***

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