

Family and Family Therapy in a Fast Changing Metropolis

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Guest Correspondent

Like the family in many global cities, the family in Singapore is rapidly changing. The trends are clear: delayed marriages, reduced birth rates, smaller nucleated households and more families with elderly members. Although broader family policies have been developed to address these phenomena, the changes in the structure of the family certainly have their impact on the dynamics of family relationship.

Singapore as a newly developed nation is often compared to the older giant world economies. The increase in material wellbeing and economic demands signal a parallel pursuit for a higher quality of life. The quality of family life is also affected. Family services and programs in Singapore have focused on the development of values so as to sustain effective family life. The values of love, care and concern, mutual respect, filial responsibility, commitment and communication promote family ties (see: http://www.aboutfamilylife.org.sg/1_3_4_0_0_0_0_0_0.htm).

Concomitant with changing societal trends, the scope for family therapy has also been enlarged. Families are coping with strains on marital and family relationship brought about by changing lifestyles. The family is more than just a provider of shelter, food and physical necessities. Members of the family need to have time together to share their feelings and aspirations rather than communicating purely about tasks to

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be done. Family therapy is shifting from mere actions to attending to the meaning of words and experiences. The focus is on improving the quality of relating amongst members of the family by identifying ways for family members to find fulfillment together as a family rather than as separate entities. In doing so, family life becomes more meaningful. The emphasis is on enhancing family interaction through family life education, including parent education and training, marriage preparation, marriage enrichment and marital and family

therapy. The goal in family intervention is thus to help families achieve higher levels of functioning, in contrast to members staying together out of economic necessity.

In a fast paced and highly mobile global city, the demands on marriages and families are great. Due to the increased movement of people for education, employment and business, new communication tools such as emails, chat-lines, ICQ and even multi-media messaging systems have become increasingly popular. Technology proves to be a boon in enhancing connectivity between people but it should not replace, wherever possible, face to face or intimate interpersonal communication where these are possible.

Marital and family practitioners are challenged to be more open to conducting therapy through conference calls or Net-meetings on the internet as well as online support groups. In the near future, accessibility to technology will be less a problem for most people. The ethical consideration of informed consent for the use of technology, confidentiality and security of the network and the responsibility of both the client and the therapist have not really been seriously considered. As the participants and therapist may not be physically present in one place at the same time, the therapeutic use of touch, non-verbal techniques and the use of the 'here and now' to promote change may be hampered. We need to pay attention to the change in the therapeutic context and the effect on both the client's and the therapist's accountability and commitment to follow up action. These concerns aside, society has moved on and the global cyberspace has become more prominent in the lives of people. Though it is still in the future, we can, and perhaps will soon, meet, albeit with care, our cyber family over cyberspace for counselling, support or even a session of therapeutic gaming. ☺



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