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Family Services

A family is viewed as a cohesive unit; when an individual within the unit has an issue, the entire unit suffers to some degree. Service agencies within the United States take a holistic approach to working with families. In fact, the services offered at most human services agencies are designed to meet individual needs but also address the family unit as a whole. Maeve O'Halloran and Owen Doody contend that an approach with a person-centered care philosophy when servicing families will enable individual family members to receive the help needed while addressing the needs of the family as a unit. Fostering relationships in the family by valuing and promoting the family's strengths is central to providing a supportive environment in family-centered services. Many agencies in the United States are designed to service families by assisting in removing barriers, strengthening

bonds, creating familial environments, and supporting the family unit.

Community Services

Community agencies within each state provide the community with mental health, intellectual disability, and substance abuse services. These services assist families by enabling participants to stay near their family and friends while receiving services. Services can be short term or long term and involve treatment planning that includes family members of the clients being serviced. Such services are also provided through local departments of human services.

Departments of Human Services

Agencies of state departments of human services offer a variety of programs to support the family. Programs include adoption, foster care, child protective services (CPS), and many other prevention services to strengthen families and improve child well-being.

Adoption agencies provide children who are unable to be raised by their biological parents the opportunity to be legally united with another family. Family service agencies work to unite children with families as well as families with children. In some instances, children can maintain contact with their biological families, but this is not common practice. Adoption offers positive benefits for the children and families. There are lifelong implications for the adopted individual, the adoptive parents, and the birth parents in navigating the new relationships. Differences in familial environments and in decisions to continue biological relationships can be a challenge to adoptive families.

Foster care is a program that provides services for children who no longer can reside with their families due to abuse, neglect, and abandonment. These children are provided a familial environment in which care is provided on a temporary basis. During this time, a permanency goal is designed to ensure the children will have an appropriate placement. The ultimate goal of foster care is reunification with the biological family. The children will remain in the foster care placement until their families are able to provide for them again or until permanent placement is available for the children.

Child protective services, a federally mandated program, accepts and investigates reports of abuse

and neglect of children under the age of 18 years. The goal of CPS is to protect children from physical, mental, and medical neglect and from sexual abuse and exploitation, as well as to prevent and alleviate family crises. Child protective services are available around the clock every day. CPS is also an intervention method to help families who are struggling. The goal is to assist families in getting back on track by intervening if abuse or neglect is present. In some circumstances, children are permanently removed from homes and become a part of the adoption and foster care programs.

Family Preservation and In-Home Service Programs

Kristin Duppong Hurley described family preservation services (FPS) as short-term, family-focused services designed to assist families in crisis by improving parenting and family functioning while keeping children safe. Jennifer Mullins described FPS as a program designed to prevent out-of-home placement for children who are at risk of child maltreatment. The services are founded on the belief that when parents are provided with services and support, the children can be protected and safe within their own families. The services are provided 24/7 and include a brief but intense four- to six-week program, as well as in-home training to provide families with skills to address real-world situations as they occur.

In-home services are performed in the client's or family's home, and typically are used by low-income families. These services can include counseling, prevention, education, and support for families who are unable to easily access services in their community. Many community programs have an in-home component to service families.

Counseling Services and Family Programs

In many areas, counseling facilities offer individual, couple, and family counseling. These services can be found in hospitals, private clinics, schools, treatment centers, and other service facilities. Many community agencies have a counseling component to assist families that qualify. Depending upon the facility, the services can be short term or long term.

Some communities have facilities that offer programs for families, such as educational workshops, counseling services, and family recreational activities. Services also include parenting support,

career development, and food support. These programs focus on removing barriers and strengthening families.

Child Care and After-School Programs

Most communities have child care facilities to support working families. Churches, educational institutions, and the workplace can provide child care services. These services provide families the opportunity to work, attend school, and perform other responsibilities. Children who attend child care facilities are given an opportunity to develop socially. Many facilities are educational facilities and provide an opportunity for educational development for the children who attend. Community-based child care programs are often supported with government funding to assist in servicing families in a holistic manner.

After-school programs provide services for families who need added support during the hours immediately following school. Each program is unique and can be housed within the local school or community agency. These programs typically are offered to elementary school children but may extend to middle school children. The average program provides tutoring services and other activities to learning such as character building.

Hospice and Respite Care

Hospice is end-of-life care for those who have been medically certified with an expected six months or less to live. Typically, hospice teams provide emotional and spiritual care for the patient and the family. Hospice can be provided in hospitals, nursing homes, or the patients' homes. Typically, patients choose to receive care in their homes to provide them more comfort and time with family.

Respite care provides family caregivers additional help with a family member who has development delays, physical disability, and/or intellectual disability. Respite care can be provided by sitter-companions in-home, at a specialized facility, at a therapeutic adult day care center, and for emergency care. Respite care provides families with a break from the day-to-day care of disabled patients. These breaks are typically short term and temporary.

Family Planning Services

Family planning clinics can be found in many communities. The World Health Organization (WHO)

describes family planning as services allowing individuals and couples to plan and prepare for their desired number of children and the timing of their births. These services include education about preparing and planning for children; education about and distribution of contraceptive methods is also a part of most family planning programs. Many clinics offer treatment of involuntary infertility. Family planning programs help prevent the transmission of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and infections. Family planning services recognize that a woman's ability to understand the importance of the number and space of her pregnancies has a direct impact on her health and well-being as well as the outcome of each pregnancy. These services have been found to reduce unsafe abortions.

Laura Wherry states that the U.S. government, under the national family planning policy, provides contraceptive and related preventive services for low-income women without health insurance or access to affordable health care. The goal of this policy is to increase access to contraceptive services, supplies, and education to reduce the number of unplanned pregnancies. Other preventive services are provided, such as breast and cervical cancer screenings and STD tests.

Family Peer Advocates

Jennifer Wisdom describes Family Peer Advocates (FPAs) as a service that provides parents with a model, coach, and support to help them understand and cope with various service systems. It is a family-to-family support service that can help reduce barriers families may face when accessing children's services, and it helps the parents become more involved in these children's services. According to the New York State Family Peer Advocate credential, FPAs have lived-experience and receive skills and training to empower and support other families. Advocates typically can be found through government agencies and state programs.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Families

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) families are gaining more interest, but are marginalized in communities and research. A number of communities offer services and centers for the LGBTQ community, and this number is increasing.

The LGBTQ centers across the United States offer services such as care management, housing, administrative support, outreach, resource centers, meals programs, HIV education and testing, case management, children's outreach, individual and family counseling, support groups, adult and youth services, and social and educational events, as well as LGBTQ video educational resources. These centers offer a safe haven for the LGBTQ population.

Families With Severe Physical Disabilities

Families with children who have physical disabilities need a variety of services and support in accordance with the unique needs of each family. P. S. Samuel explains that the traditional model of disability intervention was focused on fixing the family rather than supporting the family. Current services focus on the family and delivering the services needed. Maeve O'Halloran found that when families with children who have intellectual, developmental, or physical disabilities are serviced with a family-centered approach in which families are considered to be the center of society, better outcomes are achieved compared to traditional models. When families are supported and receive effective quality services, they in turn support the society and community in which they live.

Support for families with children who have disabilities includes services that are formal and informal as well as tangible goods that enable the full participation of each member of the family. P. S. Samuel found that minority families, such as families of color and lower socioeconomic status, face barriers in accessing these services. Minorities with disabilities in the United States are considered the most marginalized of the marginalized populations. These support services need to be more readily and easily accessible to minority families.

Community Outpatient Mental Health Services

Community mental health services that provide outpatient care offer counseling services to individuals and families that do not require the person or family to stay at the center. Outpatient care gives patients the opportunity to be a part of a familial environment on a day-to-day basis while receiving treatment. Mary J. Baker-Ericzen reported that there is a need to improve the quality of care in outpatient mental health community service agencies;

this is a national health care priority. These services are needed to provide clinical care for children and adolescents with disruptive behavior problems. Community mental health agencies also provide support for the families of children with disruptive behavior problems. These services are typically found as a part of community health departments.

Financial Services

Families all have financial obligations, and when dealing with financial obligations each family has unique circumstances. Some families are low-income and need added support, which is offered through such government services as food stamps; Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); Medicaid; Medicare; and the federally funded health and nutrition program for women, infants, and children (WIC). James Grubman explained that one of the most important decisions a family makes is whom to entrust with their financial resources. He goes on to highlight the need for financial services staff and managers to increase their knowledge of how to help families in these important areas. Socioeconomic status does not solely determine a need for financial support. Financial planning is needed for all families in preparation for the future.

Depending on the type of support a family needs, financial advisors work at local banks and financial centers, and financial educators within the community support families. These advisors provide needed information to individuals and families about managing money, budgeting, saving, loans, trust funds, investments, and other financial information and resources.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture explains that WIC provides federal grants to states for food, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breast-feeding, and non-breast-feeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to the age of 5 years. Typically, the women and families would apply for WIC at their local department of human services.

Military Family Support

Military bases worldwide offer military family support centers. Fleet and Family Support Centers are located on naval bases and provide services such as mental health counseling, financial counseling, family counseling, career counseling, referral services, community information, job-seeking information,

volunteer opportunities, homecoming support, seminars, how-to publications, outreach programs, school programs, spouse programs, teen programs, and education/classes. Many communities have Veteran Affairs (VA) facilities that provide veterans with similar services, such as education and training, vocational rehabilitation and employment, loans, life insurance, pensions, compensation, financial counseling, independent living programs, mortgage delinquency assistance, and fiduciary programs. In addition to the military bases and government offices, a few programs support military families in the community. Community agencies are evolving in their support of military families due to the growing recognition of the needs of military families.

Services for At-Risk Families

Services for at-risk families can be provided in communities, schools, and other facilities. At-risk families typically are more prone to having social and economic challenges. These families are often identified by the community in which they belong and the prevalence of challenges they face. Having one or more socioeconomic challenges can make a family prone to having other challenges. Umatilla Morrow Head Start defines at-risk families as having one or more of the following: low-income, substance abuse, child abuse, neglect, domestic violence in the home, recent divorce, loss of family member(s), child development issues, extreme or questionable health, mental health or nutrition issues, changes in typical behavior, and disabilities, among other factors such as family stress and literacy issues. Programs that service at-risk families often provide education, prevention, and methods to remove barriers to positive family development. Family service agencies are designed to address the needs of families in a holistic and comprehensive manner. The issues supported by these agencies vary, but ultimately result in increased family functioning.

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See Also: Adoption, Agencies and Services; At-Risk Youth Services; Child Protective Services; Counseling and Psychotherapy Services; Department of Health and Human Services, U.S.; Family Planning Services; Family Preservation Services; Family Reunification; Foster Care

Agencies; LGBTQ Clients; Medicaid; Medicare; Mental Health Services, Adult; Health Services, Children; Respite Care; Adoption; Foster Care; Counseling; Veteran Services; Temporary Assistance to Needy Families.

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Family Structure, Diversity of

The view of the traditional nuclear family, made up of two biological married parents with children, dominates in most social and health services delivery settings. However, family structure in the

21st century varies considerably and has significant implications for the development and delivery of family policies and human services. A review of current family arrangements reveals many family types, including not only traditional two-parent families but single-parent families, stepfamilies and blended families, cohabiting or civil union partnerships, same-sex couples, foster and adoptive families, and grandparent-headed families. Having a sound understanding of how families are organized and how family composition can influence an individual's day-to-day functioning, development, and outcomes over the life course is central for human service providers as they work to meet the needs of the clients they serve.

Describing family structures and the processes (e.g., marriage, divorce, having children) that generate those structures is rooted in the disciplines of family studies and demography (the study of the characteristics of human populations). However, a wide range of practice, research, and policy fields have had long-standing interest in understanding variation in family structure because of the broad implications such diversity has for providing services to varied populations in society. The purpose of this entry is to describe variation in family structures today with particular attention given to the diversity of family types across different demographic groups and, where applicable, prominent demographic transitions that affect family structure.

Definitions

The term *family* is defined in different ways across settings and disciplines. For example, family demographers use information about household members' sex, age, marital status, the number of people in a household, and the relationships people have to one another to describe the structure of families. The U.S. Census Bureau uses a legal definition of family in its survey research, which is "a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together." The census further defines a stepfamily as "a married-couple family household with at least one child under age 18 who is a stepchild (i.e., a son or daughter through marriage, but not by birth)," a married couple as "a husband and wife," and an unmarried couple as "two unrelated adults of the opposite sex." Numerous family subgroups are not represented by these census definitions and are