

**“One Is a Fiction”:
Family Therapy Is Social Psychiatry**

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The smallest indivisible human unit is two people, not one; one is a fiction.

From such nets of souls societies, the social world, human life springs.

— Playwright Tony Kushner

Family therapy has an intimate relationship with social psychiatry because the **family is the basic unit of society**. The family is the **bridge between the individual and society**. For every child, the **family is their vehicle for socialization**.

John Bowlby demonstrated that family attachments create “a secure base.” From this secure base, **the multigenerational family shapes society**. It’s a circular process: the family affects the child, the child affects the family, and together, they both affect/are affected by their community and, eventually, the larger society.

Here’s what we learn from the relationship between family therapy and social psychiatry:
Family relationships form the basic “unit” for individual growth and relational well-being while society is the largest “envelope” or “frame” for shaping and understanding human beings.

So, how can we extend family therapy to the community?

Doing family work *IN the community*

- Social psychiatry and family therapy **moved from asylums and hospitals to community health and social services.**

- *Expanding therapeutic resources: from the **couch** to the **one-way mirror** connecting **therapeutic teams and families through relational dialogues.***

Take-home message: Let's continue to work with families in community settings, close to where people live, go to school, work, and play.

Employing multigenerational family therapy *WITH the community*

- Working with “**larger systems**” – as demonstrated by **Mara Selvini Palazzoli** in Milan.
- Conducting **Integrative Community Therapy** practised by social psychiatrist **Adalberto Barreto** in Fortaleza and **Social Therapy** by cultural psychiatrist **Marcos de Noronha** in Florianopolis, Brazil.

Take-home message: The principles and techniques of family therapy are community resources that can be applied to solve wider community and social problems, from addictions to domestic violence to suicide.

To know more:

- Di Nicola V (2024). “The Web of Meaning”: Family Therapy is Social Psychiatry’s Therapeutic Branch. *Psychiatric Times*, April 3, 2024. <https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/-the-web-of-meaning-family-therapy-is-social-psychiatrys-therapeutic-branch>
- Selvini Palazzoli M, Anolli L, Di Blasio P, Giossi L, Pisano I, Ricci C, Sacchi M, Ugazio V. (1986). *The Hidden Games of Organizations*. Pantheon Books.
- Barreto AP, Filha MO, Silva MZ, Di Nicola V. (2020). Integrative Community Therapy in the time of the new coronavirus pandemic in Brazil and Latin America. *World Social Psychiatry*, 2(2): 103-105.