

Rebooting the family: a pilot study on the application of family therapy in helping drug rehabilitees under isolated compulsory detoxification treatment

SPEAKER: DR. XIA LILI

ASSOCIATE RESEARCHER, ZHEJIANG UNIVERSITY IN MAINLAND CHINA.

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Abstract

Anti-drug strategies in China have been harsh and punitive, with isolated compulsory detoxification treatment (I-CDT) as the major drug rehabilitation modality in the past decades. Drug users in the compulsory correctional facilities receive detoxification treatment, physical exercise, psychological counseling, moral and legal education, drug and health education, skills training, and discipline training, as well as manual labor. However, such mode of drug treatment has been criticized for human right concerns and the lack of efficacy in preventing relapse. In recent years, the government has realized the problems with traditional I-CDT and has begun to incorporate “humanistic services” in the treatment. This study reports the preliminary findings of a pilot program of applying family therapy in helping drug users in one provincial-level compulsory detoxification center. A total of 10 drug users (all male) and their families received one to five sessions of family therapy through an encrypted online video-meeting platform during September 2022 and January 2023. After the treatment, both the service recipients and the officers of the detoxification center reported “magic positive changes” of not only the drug users but also their family relations. In this seminar, I will share the therapeutic process and key elements of family therapy in helping this specific clientele, by analyzing the therapy videotapes and the post-treatment interviews with the service users. Suggestions for the transformation and improvement of future drug rehabilitation modalities were indicated.

Biography

Dr. XIA Lili (Lily), currently an Associate Researcher (equivalent to Assistant Professor) at the Department of Sociology, Zhejiang University in Mainland China. She obtained her degrees in social work and related disciplines from Peking University and the Chinese University of Hong Kong. She also has professional qualifications as social worker and family therapist. Dr. Xia’s studies are mainly intervention-centered and practice-oriented, with research and practice interests in the field of family wellbeing, children with special educational needs, people with mental health issues, project evaluation and social work training and education. The several on-going and upcoming projects include “Developing and Examining the Model of Multiple Family Therapy in Helping Chinese Adolescents with Psychological Crisis: an Exploratory Study” (National Social Science Research Fund), “Strengthening Case Management Capacity for the Integrated Child Protection Model” (United Nations Children’s Fund), “The Efficacy of Family Therapy in Helping People under Compulsory Detoxification Treatment” (Consultation Study by Local Government), and “The Comparison Study of Family Wellbeing between Hong Kong and Hangzhou during the Covid-19 Pandemic” (The Family Welfare Society of Hong Kong).

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