



# United Nations Family Therapy for Adolescents with Drug Use Disorders including in Contact with the Criminal Justice System

## **UNFT: UNODC Training Package on Family Therapy**

José Szapocznik, Ph.D.  
Director, Brief Strategic Family Therapy Institute  
University of Miami Miller School of Medicine



# Objectives:

To discuss:

- the context for adolescent development and behavior.
- some of the evidence of Family Therapy (FT) as a preventive and treatment intervention for a many behaviors problematic to society and the family.
- clinical aspects of family therapy.

# Risk and Protective Factors for Drug Use, Crime, and other negative outcomes such as Depression, Alienation and Violent Extremism

- *Family distress is a risk factors for:*
  - *drug initiation and continuation*
  - *Crime*
  - *Violence and Radicalization*
  - *Mental Health*

**Table 1. Potential Risk Factors for Radicalizing to Violent Extremism**

Risk Factor	Radicalization	Violence
Experiencing identity conflict/being a loner	•	
Feeling there is a lack of meaning in life	•	
Wanting status	•	
Failing to achieve aspirations		•
Wanting to belong/trouble with platonic relationships	•	•
Trouble in romantic relationships		•
Desiring action or adventure/military experience	•	•
Having experienced trauma/abuse	•	•
Having mental health issues or being emotionally unstable/troubled	•	•
Being naïve or having little knowledge of religion and ideology	•	
Having strong religious beliefs/extremist ideology	•	•
Having grievances	•	
Feeling under threat	•	
Having an "us versus them" world view	•	
Justifying violence or illegal activity as a solution to problems	•	
Having engaged in previous criminal activity	•	•
Involvement with a gang or delinquent peers		•
Stressors (e.g., a family crisis, being fired from a job)	•	•
Societal discrimination or injustice	•	
Exposure to violent extremist groups or individuals	•	•
Exposure to violent extremist belief systems or narratives	•	•
Family members or friends in violent extremist network	•	•

RTI International (2018), Countering Violent Extremism: The Application of Risk Assessment Tools in the Criminal Justice and Rehabilitation Process. Literature Review, Department of Homeland Security. P. 5-6

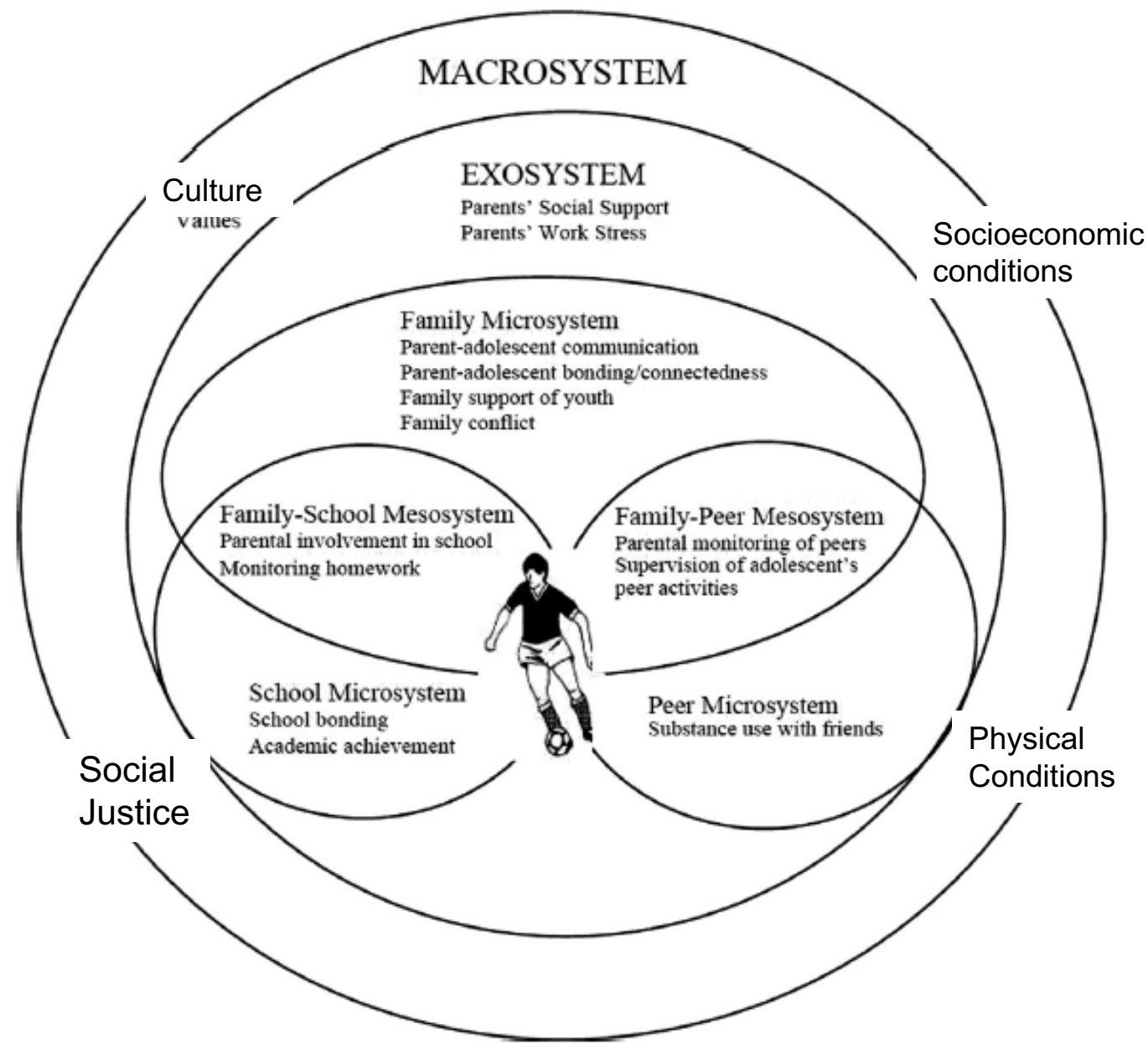


Fig. 1. Ecodevelopmental systems. (From Pantin H, Schwartz SJ, Sullivan S, et al. Preventing substance abuse in Hispanic immigrant adolescents: an ecocultural approach. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 2003;25(4):477; with permission.)

## Child Development: Heredity vs. Environment

U.S. National Academy of Sciences

*Research of gene-environment interactions and epigenetics show that the way heredity is expressed in behavior depends dramatically on environmental influences, of which the family is the most impactful.*

The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for all Youth. Washington, D.C. National Academy of Sciences, 2019

*According to the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, intervention in the present can remedy past adverse experiences.*

*Research is definitive that changes in the family will influence children's future development and outcomes.*

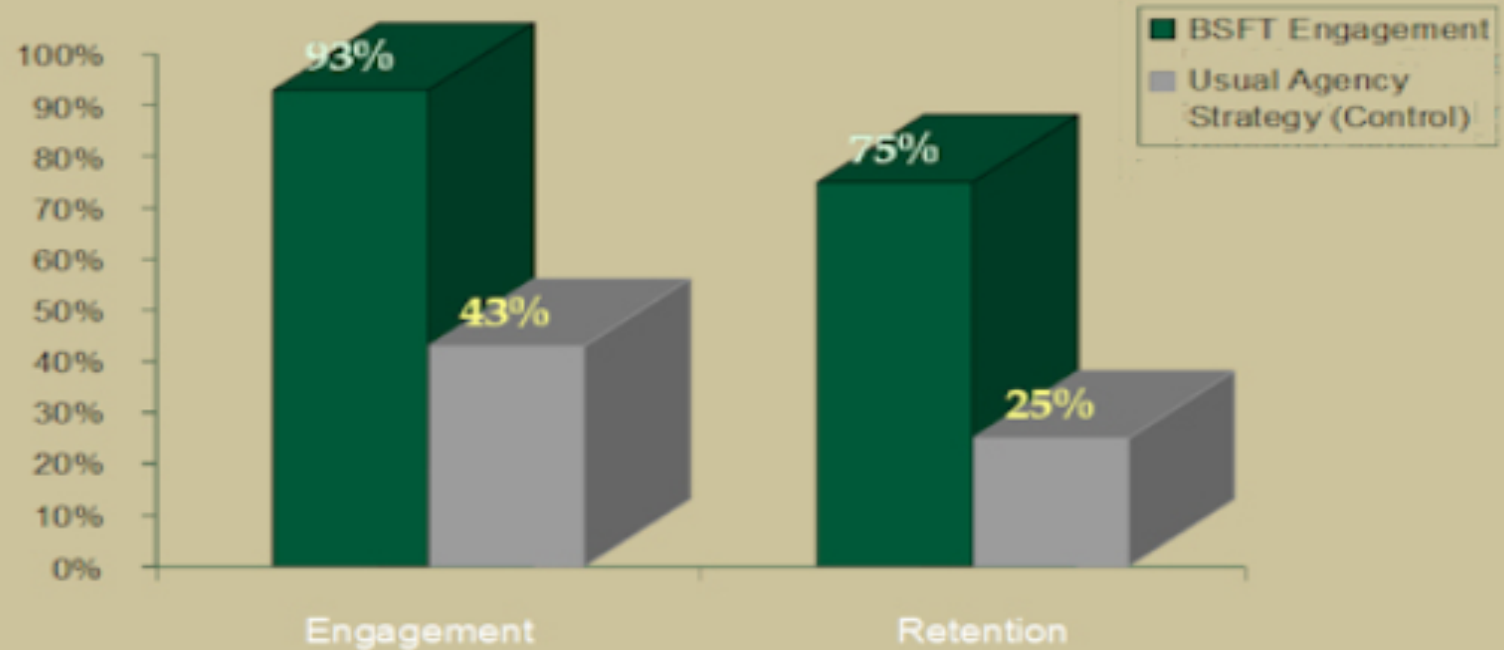
Therefore,

*United Nations Family Therapy  
for Families with Adolescents  
with Drug Use Disorders,  
and may be involved with the Criminal  
Justice System*

*for low- and medium-income countries*

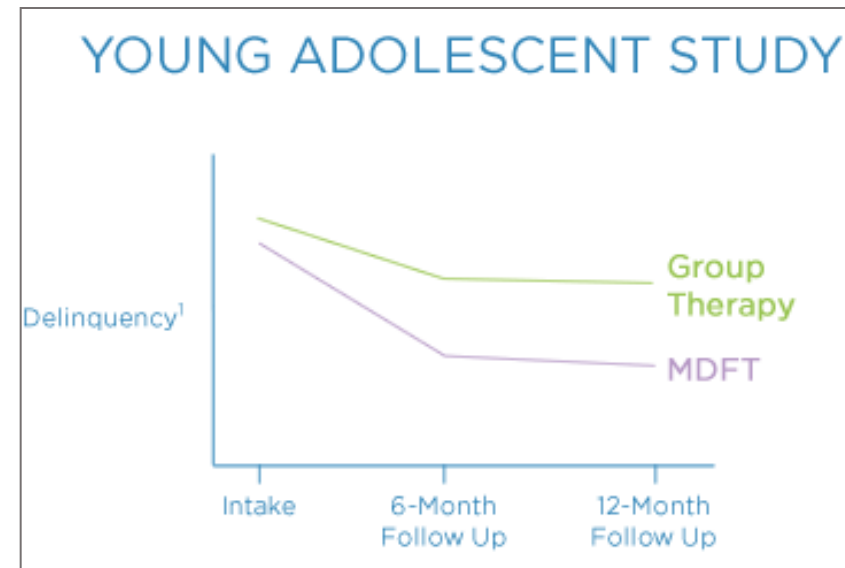
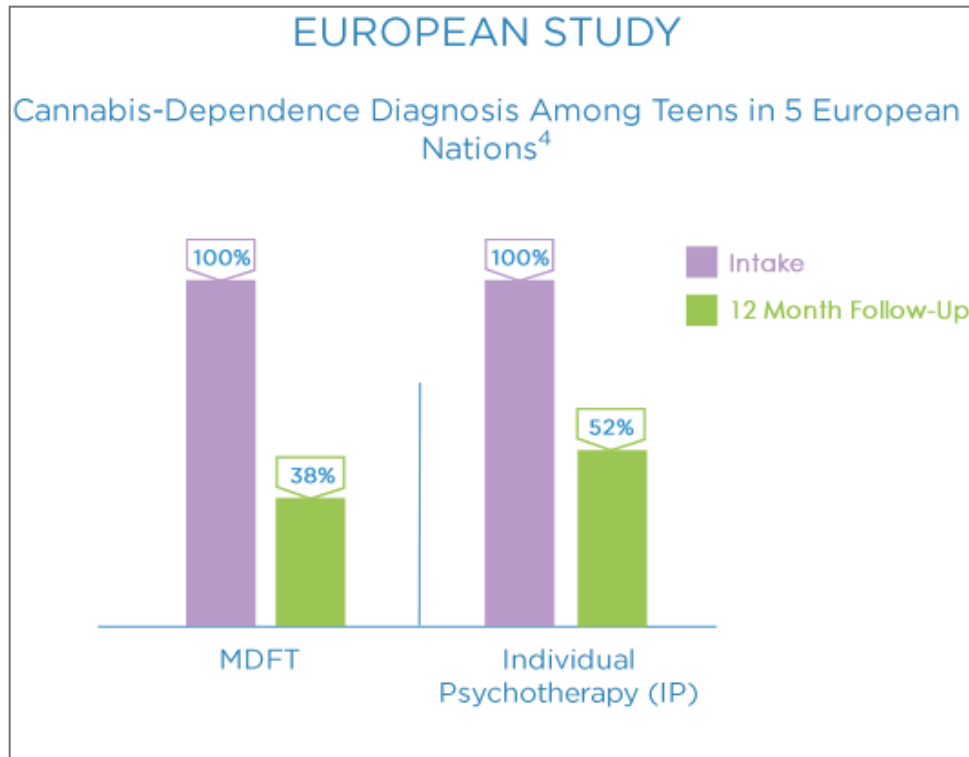
FT is an evidence-based approach to increase  
Engagement & Retention rate in treatment  
(BSFT)

*Engaging and Retaining Difficult  
Youth and Family Members*





# FT is evidence-based approach to reduce substance use and delinquency (MDFT)



# *FT is evidence-based approach to reduce and prevent criminal behaviours among for Gang-affiliated youths*

- i.e. BSFT, FFT-G
- One RCT (FFT-G) demonstrated reduction in recidivism and substance use for high gang risk youths
- However, these programmes require well-qualified experts

**Recidivism for Months 7–18 From Official Records, Adjusted, by Treatment Group and Gang Risk Status**

Variable	High Gang Risk						
	FFT-G		Treatment as Usual		p-level	Effect Size	Odds Ratio
	%/Mean	(n)	%/Mean	(n)			
% arrested	12.50 <sup>*a</sup>	32	30.00	30	.039	—	.15
# arrests	.16 <sup>*a</sup>	32	.43	30	.017	-.45	—
% with felony charges	6.25 <sup>*a</sup>	32	30.00	30	.032	—	.11
% with person charges	3.12 <sup>+a</sup>	32	23.33	30	.060	—	.08
% with property charges	6.25	32	20.00	30	.152	—	.23
% with drug charges	3.12	32	13.33	30	.131	—	.06
% adjudicated delinquent	12.50	32	23.33	30	.117	—	.26
% with residential stays	46.88	32	63.33	30	.154	—	.40
Days in residential placement	87.71	32	202.84	30	.213	-.18	—

Notes. Adjusted means are predicted values from regressions that control for the three variables that differed significantly between the treatment groups at pretest (general delinquency variety, % in residential, and hard drug variety) and the pretreatment measure of the outcome variable. For comparisons among high-gang-risk cases, felony charges adjudicated delinquent and attitudes unfavorable toward delinquency are also controlled. ES estimates are standardized mean differences.

<sup>a</sup>Interaction of treatment by gang risk status,  $p < .05$ .

<sup>\*</sup> $p < .05$ . <sup>+</sup> $p < .10$ .

# Across the major family therapy programs

- Brief Strategic Family Therapy
- Functional Family Therapy
- Multidimensional Family Therapy
- Multisystemic Family Therapy

There are dozens of studies with outcomes for better family and adolescent functioning

Horigian, Anderson & Szapocznik. (2016).  
Family-based treatment for adolescent  
substance abuse. Child Adolesc Psychiatric Clin  
N Am, 25, 603-628.

# Outcomes from Randomized Clinical Trials include:

## In the teen:

- Reductions in drug use
- Reductions in delinquent behaviors
- Reduction and prevention of criminal behaviors
- Improvements in mental health functioning
- Prevention of out of home placements

## In the family

- Improved family communication, competence, functioning
- Improve engagement and retention of adolescents and their families

## In schools and with peers:

- School attendance and school grades
- Reductions in sibling drug use
- Reductions in peer problems

Horigian, Anderson & Szapocznik. (2016).  
Family-based treatment for adolescent  
substance abuse. Child Adolesc Psychiatric Clin  
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# What is Family Therapy?

*Imagine that I am trapped with a stinking skunk in a room and we are chained to each other, and we each have a part of the key that keep us trapped.*

*Our impulse is to move away from each other, but when we pull away from each other, we move away from finding a solution to our captivity.*

*We must change our relationship and come together to put the parts of the key together to release us both.*

*What we change in families is how they InterACT.*

*We use the strength of the connection of the family  
to transform the nature of their interactions.*



*Families change because the love that is trapped behind the anger is allowed to flourish.*

*Family Therapy transforms family interactions from:*

- *conflictive to collaborative*
- *from anger to love*
- *from negative to positive.*

*Because teenagers are too powerful in the context of their powerful peers, because they are bigger and stronger than the parent, because their brain is at the developmental stage that propels them increasingly to be more autonomous and independent, it is neither possible nor desirable for a parent to overpower the adolescent. The most effective influence that parent can possibly have on the teenager is in the context of*

*love*



*If a youth gets love from a parent, there is a good chance that that parent will have influence on that adolescent's life. But when an adolescent gets the love and belonging they need from a gang member or a drug pusher, that gang member or pusher will have more influence than the parent.*

National Survey Highlights Parents' Role in Protecting Teens From  
Substance Use

# *Family therapy elements*

Hogue, Bobek, Daubber, Henderson & Southam-Gerow. (2019). Core Elements of Family Therapy for Adolescent Behavior Problems: Empirical distillation of three manualized treatments. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 48:1, 29-41.

# Key elements of the intervention

- Joining (earning the trust of the family by validating, empathizing, giving hope - in a way that is culturally syntonic).
- Encouraging family members to interact to observe interactional patterns.
- Changing the meaning of interactions from negative to positive through reframing (that is culturally syntonic) to create a motivational context for change.
- Orchestrating more adaptive interactions

## *A Powerful Tool*

*Reframing uncovers the positive experiences that underlie families' routines by peeling back the ugliness of an interaction to reveal its beauty and its strength. The love that lives below the anger; the hurt that lives below the fury; the caring that lives below the rejection.*

*Thank you*