ENHANCING CLINIC RESOURCES TO OPTIMIZE RESEARCH ON EFFECTIVE MENTAL HEALTH INTERVENTIONS AND TRAINING FOR COUNSELORS

Professional Counseling faculty support the University’s mission to produce relevant evidence-based research with client-related outcomes. Research Goals: Update and maintain the technology, counseling environments, and human capital necessary to conduct rigorous research on teaching, learning, and various therapeutic approaches by leveraging the 1000+ counseling sessions provided each year.

Current Clinic Resources

• Fully-equipped teaching clinics provide supervised clinical experience for master's degree-seeking counseling students and vital, affordable mental health services to the community
• Over 1000 counseling sessions per year to primarily low-income, underserved clients
  – couples, families, and individuals ages 3 and older
  – fees based on sliding scale; no one is turned away due to inability to pay
• Hands-on training through coursework and practicum for ~70 professional counseling graduate students each year
  – close collaboration with faculty and clinical staff
  – integrate and apply theory, knowledge and skills, and research-based best practices to develop professional skills
• San Marcos (Education Building) / Round Rock (Avery Building)
  – waiting rooms
  – 17 SM/6 RR treatment rooms with built-in audio and video surveillance and recording systems, which transmit data to secure servers
  – 2/1 play therapy rooms
  – 3/1 observation rooms – allows students and faculty to observe live or recorded video/audio
• FERPA-/HIPAA-secure client records room (SM & RR) – currently use only paper records

Current Research Activity and Findings

• HUMAN-ANIMAL RESILIENCE THERAPY – examined effectiveness with youth ages 10-18
  – significant differences between treatment and comparison groups on pre-/post-test scores for anxiety, depression, and disruptive behavior inventories
  – no significant differences for the self-concept or anger inventories
  – no significant between-group differences
• ANIMAL-ASSISTED COUNSELING (AAC) ACADEMY, launched in 2016
  – intensive introductory and advanced professional training program for graduate students and professionals
  – seeks to improve children and family wellbeing through positive human-animal interactions and related research

Emerging Research Topics

• ANIMAL-ASSISTED COUNSELING
• MINDFULNESS
• PLAY THERAPY
• SANDTRAY THERAPY

Needed Resources

To facilitate rigorous research on training and learning outcomes for continuous program improvement
• FERPA-/HIPAA-compliant electronic clinic data collection and management system to replace current paper files
• Assessment instruments to measure client progress (e.g., OQ-45, Y-OQ, SRS, ORS)
• Data management and storage software to sort, organize, and store session video and audio recordings

Emerging Research Topics

To improve client experience and extend clinic impact
• Update treatment rooms – chairs/furniture, rugs, and therapeutic resources for teens and animal-assisted counseling
• Improve parking/access to SM & RR clinics for clients
• Establish school- and community-based clinics

Future Research

• Mine electronic client databases and videotaped sessions in real time and longitudinally to
  – track client progress
  – compare efficacy of different therapeutic approaches
  – evaluate and continually improve training methods and learning outcomes
• Introduce new variables and track progress using new measures
• Impact of emotionally-focused therapy as compared to solution-focused therapy in working with couples
• Influence of sandtray therapy on youth ages 10-18
• Measure impact of animal-assisted counseling vs. talk therapy on stress measures for college students ages 18-25
• Develop and validate Animal-Assisted Counseling Competency Scale (AACCS) through the AAC Academy
• Conduct randomized control study of counseling-specific mindfulness training and positive client outcomes

Researchers

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