

Career Outlook for Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists

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Introduction

The career outlook for licensed marriage and family therapists in the United States is optimistic and bright. The information provided by resources such as the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Outlook Handbook, the National Center for O*Net Development and the U.S. News and World Report's 2020 Best Jobs Edition offer a consistent and clear picture about the tasks, work values and responsibilities in this growing field. Additionally, the information shared in these online resources corroborate with the feedback provided in the professional interview conducted with Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist Laura Speiller. Finally, the present author understands the Biblical importance of strong marriages and families in God's design for His people and will offer additional commentary about this subject.

Occupational Outlook Handbook

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics publishes the Occupational Outlook Handbook. Under the category of Marriage and Family Therapist ("MFT"), the Handbook projects an anticipated growth of 12,300 new jobs between 2018-2028 (www.bls.gov, 2019). Please see Appendix A for a detailed chart of these projections (refer to the "Community and "Social Service" indicators). The Handbook also states that the employment of MFTs in this field is expected to grow by 22 percent from 2018 to 2028 which is a rate that is much faster than the average for all occupations. The reason for this significant growth can be attributed to the increasing practice of integrative care in which an interdisciplinary team of specialists addresses an individual's multiple needs at one time. Marriage and family therapists work with other counselors to deal with issues such as mental health, substance abuse, behavior disorder, etc. as a team. The Occupational Outlook Handbook states the median 2018 annual wage for MFTs was \$50,090 or \$24.08 per hour (www.bls.gov, 2019). Most MFTs generally work full-time.

From the Marriage and Family Therapists Summary Page in the U.S. Labor of Bureau Statistics' Occupational Outlook Handbook (www.bls.gov, 2019), Marriage and Family Therapists are described as working with clients to help them overcome problems with family and other relationships. Clients can be individuals, couples and families. The Summary Page notes that MFTs often use Cognitive Behavioral Therapy as the primary form of therapy. Clients replace their maladaptive thoughts, feelings and behaviors with positive ones. MFT's must obtain a Master's degree in Psychology, Marriage and Family Therapy or a related mental health field in order to become licensed as a Marriage and Family Therapist.

Additionally, graduate students must complete an internship/residency where they receive supervised clinical work. Interns provide family therapy, group therapy, psychotherapy and other forms of therapy under the supervision of a licensed counselor. Also, Marriage and Family Therapists work in a variety of different settings including mental health centers, substance use treatment centers, hospitals and in private practice. Important characteristics and personal qualities possessed by an MFT are "compassion, interpersonal skills, listening skills, organizational skills and speaking skills" (www.bls.gov, 2019).

O*NET Program

According to the National Center for O*NET Online Development website, the O*NET Program is the nation's primary source of occupational information. The O*Net database contains specific descriptions of almost 1,000 occupations in the U.S. economy (www.onetonline.org, 2019). Information is continually updated on the databases to provide the most current information for job seekers. The O*NET website describes Marriage and Family Therapists "as treating mental and emotional disorders (cognitive, affective and/or behavioral) within the context of marriage and family systems" (www.onetonline.org, 2019). The field of

Marriage and Family Therapy is given a “Bright Outlook” category which represents any occupations are expected to either 1) grow rapidly in the next several years or 2) will have large numbers of job openings.

On the Summary Report for MFTs, users can filter information under 13 domains: Tasks, Technology Skills, Knowledge, Skills, Abilities, Work Activities, Detailed Work Activities, Work Content, Job Zone, Education, Interests, Work Styles and Work Values. The level of detail and explanation under each domain is extensive, and one can easily navigate through a particular occupation to assess occupational fit by reviewing the descriptors under each domain. A user can filter the information and save the sorted table for each domain to be reviewed at length. Two domains that present author found to be most helpful as compared to the more general information found in the Occupational Outlook Handbook are the Interests and Work Values domains. The information contained in those particular domains appear to align with the tenets of the Trait-and-Factor and Person-Environment-Correspondence (PEC) theories.

In the Interests domain, detailed information is further categorized into the three sub-domains of Social, Artistic and Investigative. Under the Work Values domain, the sub-domains of Relationships, Independence and Achievement further specify what an individual may potentially find in the MFT field. Another excellent feature can be found in the authentic comments made by MFTs in the Work Context. Under the sub-domain “Deal with Unpleasant or Angry People,” the comment listed notes “Once a week or more but not every day” (www.onetonline.org, 2019). A second sub-domain is “Physically Proximity” and the following comment is provided: “Moderately close (at arm’s length) (www.onetonline.org, 2019). For a person who prefers to work with machines instead of humans, this would be an important factor

to pay attention to. 23 categories allow for job seekers to have a better understanding of the work environments and context that an MFT might experience.

Lastly, two other very effective features on O*NET that allow a job seeker to act immediately to assess his or her skills and interests are the Interest Profiler tool and the CareerOneStop web browser (www.onetonline.org, 2019). The Interest Profiler asks a series of 60 questions to determine an occupational fit based on an individual's interests. The CareerOneStop allows job seekers to search for credentialing opportunities at local colleges and universities as well as apply for specific jobs from organizations seeking to hire MFTs. By adding her zip code information, 37 job openings seeking MFTs with full descriptions were displayed on the site (www.onetonline.org, 2019). Having now been exposed to the wonderful resource information available on O*NET, the present author plans to use this resource for her own future career exploration as well as for the benefit of clients at her internship site with young mothers who struggle with substance use disorders.

U.S. News & World Report: 2020 Best Jobs Edition

In the 2020 Best Jobs Edition of U.S. News & World Report, the occupation of Marriage and Family Therapists was ranked number five for 2020 Best Social Service Jobs (beating sixth-ranked Mental Health Counselor), and which was listed overall number 51 in Top 100 Best Jobs (www.money.usnews.com, 2019). U.S. News & World Report also listed “empathy,” “patience” and “flexibility” as important interpersonal skills. U.S. News also reported the five best-paying cities for MFTs were located in Provo, Utah (\$95,670), Urban Honolulu, Hawaii (\$86,440), York, Pennsylvania (\$81,640), Eugene, Oregon (\$78,150) and Fayetteville, North Carolina (\$77,150) (www.money.usnews.com). The magazine also noted the following:

Many professionals in the social service industry said that their job

is more of a calling than a choice and that helping people is one of the most rewarding parts. From hairdressers and nail technicians, to counselors, social workers and therapists, those in the business of serving others like interacting with people and appreciate the small and significant ways they're able to impact people's lives.

(www.money.usnews.com)

Comparison with the Professional Interview

The information about licensed Marriage and Family counselors corroborates with the perspectives shared in an interview conducted with Laura Speiller, a Christian Licensed Mental Health Counselor in February 2020. Laura conducts counseling to individuals and couples at a counseling center in Midtown Manhattan in New York City. Laura holds two Master's degrees: (Christian Counseling and Urban Ministry) as well as a Doctorate of Ministry degree in Global Urban Ministry. Laura also facilitate group and family therapy for female incarcerated inmates at a prison in North Carolina during her internship. As stated in Occupational Handbook, Laura also believes that empathy and attending skills are important characteristics to possess as a counselor. Similar to the feedback that U.S. News & World Reports' findings of individuals in the social service interview of "calling," Laura also noted that she enjoys the satisfaction and fulfillment of her work as a counselor. She believes that she is doing "Kingdom work" (L. Speiller, personal communication, January 30, 2020).

Although Laura did not share salary information during her interview time, one would surmise that her salary aligns with the U.S. median rate noted by the Occupational Outlook Handbook, O*NET and U.S. News & World Report Best Jobs Edition. Where Laura differs in her choice of therapy as compared to the Handbook is her lack of CBT usage in her practice.

Laura does not use CBT because she does not believe that CBT can produce deep enough levels of emotional healing from trauma for her particular clients. As a result, Laura has obtained advanced training in Emotionally-Focused Therapy (EFT), Accelerated Dynamic Psychotherapy (AEDP) and in Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills (P.A.I.R.S) to treat her clients. She noted that a newly licensed MFT can certainly use CBT in a new practice, but eventually, it is ideal to incorporate other therapies that might be able to provide greater therapeutic results.

MFTs and Kingdom Work

More than 80% of Americans reported that religion as being fairly important or very important in their lives (Newport, 2010 as cited by McNeil et al., 2017). As such, it would be logical that clients participating in counseling would likely incorporate their religious or spiritual beliefs into their therapy settings. Unfortunately, however, in their study of 135 MFT graduate and doctoral students, McNeil et al. (2012) found that less than half of the respondents had received any training regarding incorporating spirituality and religion in clinical practice and none had received any training on how to do so in their training program. In order to properly equip these graduate and doctoral students for their work as MFTs, it is important provide necessary training around the issues of religion and faith to enable these students to accommodate these important discussions with their clients, enabling them to become more culturally competent MFTs.

Unlike secular MFTs who may not embrace the ideas of faith, Christian Marriage and Family Therapists understand the Biblical importance of marriage and family which explain the idea of vocation. Extensive Scripture verses reinforce the belief that God created marriage and the family structure as part of His design for mankind. God did not want Adam to be alone so He

created Eve as his helpmeet in Genesis 2:18. In Revelation 19:7 (ESV), the church is viewed as the spotless bride waiting for her bridegroom to return: "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." The Ten Commandments teach about the importance of honoring the family relationships as seen in Exodus 20:12 (KJV): "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." Children are to be taught of the Lord (Isaiah 54:13), and the Bible is meant to be studied together as a family to obtain greater understanding about the family and life (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

Conclusion

The future employment opportunities for Marriage and Family Therapists are vast. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Outlook Handbook notes that the field is expected to grow by 22 percent between 2018-2028. The Bright Outlook status has been given to the field of Marriage and Family Therapy by the National Center for O*NET Development Online, and U.S News & World Report's 2020 Best Jobs Edition ranks this occupation as the fifth best social service job where MFTs in Provo, Utah earn nearly a six-figure salary. Christian MFTs can derive a deep sense of satisfaction and fulfillment in their work to strengthen marriages and family relationships. Christian graduate counseling students have the assurance that if the God of Covenant calls them into this field, He will surely provide for them, for He will: "equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever" (Hebrews 13:21).

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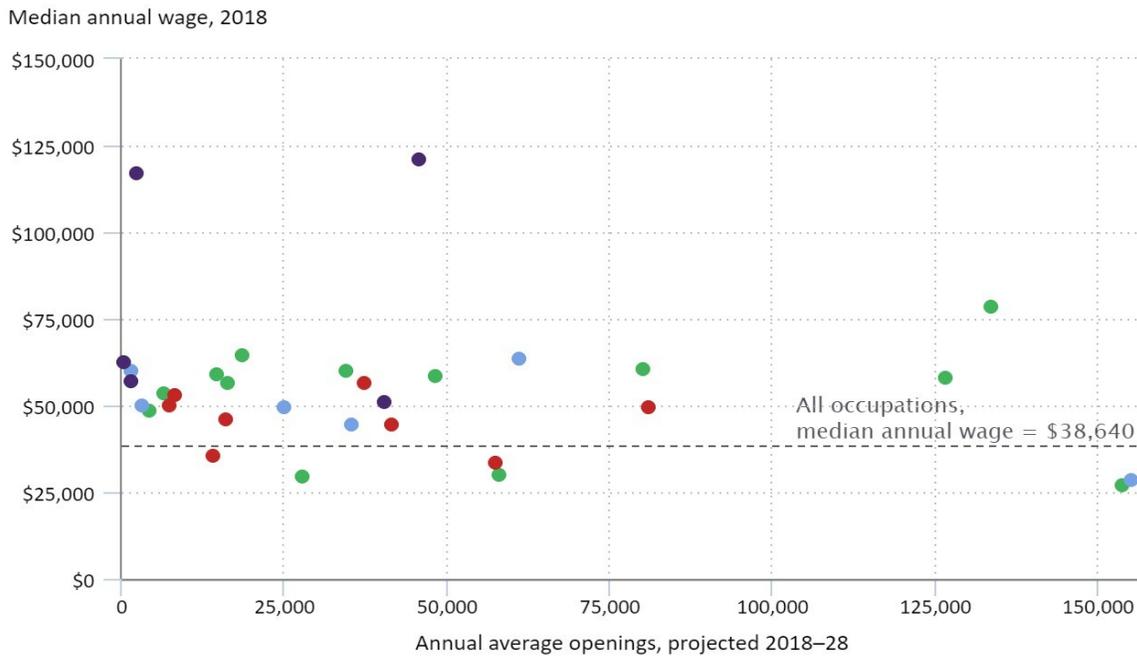
Appendix A

Chart 3: Education, Protective Service, Social and Legal Occupations
Median Annual Wages and Occupational Outlook, 2018-28, Annual Average

Chart 3. Education, protective service, social service, and legal occupations

Median annual wages, 2018, and occupational openings, projected 2018–28, annual average

- Education, training, and library
- Protective service
- Community and social service
- Legal



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics (wages) and Employment Projections (projected openings).



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