

Mental Health Issues and Cultural Factors



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Objectives

- To examine and explore how culture impacts belief systems on mental illness
- To develop an understanding of Culture-Bound Syndromes as defined by DSM-IV-TR
- To develop cultural competent skills to work effectively with families in which there may be mental health issues



Mental Health Statistics

- 1 out of 5 Americans (approximately 22.1%), 18 years or older are diagnosis with a mental health disorder each year
- 1 out of 10 adults (19 million Americans) experience depression
- 1 in 4 women will likely experience clinical depression
- Depression is most likely to be experience by people between the ages of 24 and 44



Mental Health Statistics

- 66% of people diagnosis with depression do not get treatment
- Bipolar Disorder affects approximately 1% of the American population
- Postpartum Depression occurs in 10% to 15% of all women and up to 28% of women living in poverty
- Schizophrenia affects approximately 1% of the American population



Mental Health Statistics

- Anxiety Disorders are the most common mental health illness in the United States
- Anxiety Disorders (Phobias, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Panic Disorder, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) affect more than 19 million people each year

Statistics taken from Wisconsin United for Mental Health – wimentalhealth.org



Mental Health Statistics

- Research indicates that there exists gender differences in rates of mental illness
- Depression, anxiety disorder, and phobia are more prevalent with African American women than men. Research findings also indicate that this holds true for White women and men



Mental Health Exercise

Please, divide into groups of 5 and discuss the following questions?

- How would you define mental health?
- What is your earliest experience of being around a person who had a mental illness?



Mental Health, Mental Health Issues, and Mental Health Illness - Definitions

- Mental Health – The successful performance of mental function, resulting in productive activities, healthy and fulfilling relationships with others, and the ability to adapt to change and to cope with adversity.
- Mental Health Issues: Signs or symptoms of a mental health problem may be present but lack the intensity or duration to meet DSM-IV criteria



Mental Health, Mental Health Problems, and Mental Illness Definitions

- Mental Illness – Refers to all mental disorders, which are health conditions characterized by alterations in thinking, mood, or behavior (or a combination) associated with distress and/ or impaired functioning – DSM-IV diagnosis
- Mental health, mental problems and mental illness can be viewed as part of a continuum



Culture

Culture:

The integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, speech, customs, beliefs, values, social forms and material traits of a racial, religious or social group



Culture Helps To Define....

- Family System - How family is defined
- Social Relationships
- Child Rearing Practices
- Perceptions / beliefs on health, mental health, and substance abuse issues
- Help Seeking Behaviors
- Communication Patterns



Some Common Beliefs on Why Mental Illness Exists

- Caused by evil spirits
- A result of bad karma
- Leaving one's village, town or home – migration
- A result of a person's bad behavior or ancestor's bad deeds
- It is a contagious disease
- Discussing and talking about mental illness can lead to mental illness
- A result of criminal behavior



How does Culture Impact Attitudes and Beliefs towards Mental Illness

- It affects the ways in which a person from a given culture communicates and exhibits symptoms of the mental illness
- Defines a person's coping skills
- Defines how a person's family and community supports respond to mental illness
- Help Seeking behaviors – The willingness of the person to pursue treatment



Language

- Language plays an important role in how a person communicates mental health issues or problems
- In some cultures (American Indians and Native Alaskan), there are no words like depression and anxiety; but it does not mean that these symptoms aren't experienced by people in these cultures
- In some cultures, symptoms and signs associated with a DSM-IV diagnosis may be communicated differently



Culture Bound Syndromes

- Culture Bound Syndromes or Cultural Specific Diseases are distress idioms that appear more common to a particular racial and ethnic groups (DSM-IV TR)
- Research has not determined whether culture-bound syndromes are distinct from established mental disorders, variants of them, or whether mental disorders and culture-bound syndromes reflect different ways in which the cultural and social environment interacts to shape illness (Surgeon General's report- Chapter 1)



Cultural Exercise – What are these Culture Bound Syndromes?

- **Brain Fag – West African**
- **Colera – Latino**
- **Falling-Out – African American (Southern United States)**
- **Ghost Sickness – American Indian**
- **Mal de ojo – Latino**
- **Locura - Latino**
- **Susto - Latino**
- **Wind or Cold Illness – Latinos and Asians**
- **Windigo Psychosis – Chippewa and Ojibwa**



Cultural Formation - Assessment

- Cultural Identity – Includes the person's cultural or ethnic preference, language use and preference, and the degree of involvement with the culture of origin versus the host culture (migration)
- Cultural Explanation of Individual's illness
- Cultural Factors Related to Psychosocial environment and level of functioning
- Cultural elements of the relationship between the individual and the worker –i.e. Not understanding the role of machismo and marianismo in the Latino culture could easily lead to the diagnosis of women in this culture with Dependent Personality Disorder



Cultural Factors That Impact Mental Health In African Americans

- History of African American People – Racism/Discrimination
- Income
- Gender
- Religion and Spirituality
 1. A person with psychiatric issues may be viewed as “possessed by the devil”



Cultural Factors That Impact Mental Health In African Americans

2. Some African Americans believe that emotional, behavioral, and relationship challenges result from not believing and practicing the Bible

- Family
- Traditional beliefs about mental health – Therapy is for “crazy” people



Cultural Factors That Impact Mental Health In American Indians

- History – Genocide/ taking of land
- Tribal Identity
- Income – Lower socioeconomic status is associated with a higher risk of exposure to trauma. Trauma has a direct impact on mental health
- Family
- Language – There are over 200 American Indian tribal languages
- Spirituality
- Traditional belief system on Mental Health



Cultural Factors That Influence Mental Health In Asian Americans

- Language- This can be a barrier
- Level of Acculturation – It generally takes about 3 generations before a family is acculturated into Western Society
- Age – In terms of migration, younger people tend to adapt more readily to living in a new culture
- Gender
- Occupational Issues
- Family
- Religious Beliefs and Spirituality
- Traditional beliefs about mental health – mental illness is caused by lack of harmony of emotions or evil spirits



Cultural Factors That Impact Mental Health In Latino Americans

- Level of Acculturation
- Immigration
- Language
- Family
- Gender – Machismo and marianismo
- Income
- Religious/Spirituality –
Curanderos/Curanderas; Brujos/Brujas
- Cultural Identity - Nationality



Factors Associated with Why Ethnic Minority Groups May Not Use Mental Health Services

- Acculturation
- Help-Seeking Behaviors
- Stigma
- Ethnic Identity
- Racism
- Spirituality



Somatization

- Symptoms of a physical illness that can't be explained in medical terms
- Somatization is thought to mask psychiatric symptom distress or mental illness
- Somatic symptoms may be a more acceptable way of expressing suffering than psychiatric disorders



Case Study

You are a case manager working with a Vietnamese family. The family has been in the United States for 2 years. One day, you go for a home visit to the family. While talking to the mother, she says that her 5 year old daughter has been sick with a fever for 3 days. The little girl has no appetite or energy. The little girl comes out and you notice that her skin is dry, hot, flushed and there are several significant bruises in a regular pattern. As a worker with this family, how would you work with the family based upon your observation?



Case Study # 2

Maria is a 18 year-old single Puerto Rican-American woman who has begun to become withdrawn, quieter, and has recently started talking to herself. Maria tends to be shy and likes to stay at home. About a year ago, Maria felt rejected by a boyfriend. Her family reports that her behavior changed. They report that she began to spend long periods in the bathroom and engaged in excessive hand washing.



Case Study # 2

Maria's parents are older and traditional in their lifestyle. They thought that Maria may have a hex on her and took her to see a curanderas. The curandera performed religious rituals, said prayers, and prescribed teas for Maria to drink. Maria's behaviors improved for a brief period of time but soon returned. How would you assist this family in addressing the mental health issues that are present?



Cultural Competent Practice

- Learn about the person's cultural identity. (How has history or history in society impacted his or her world view?)
- Explore possible cultural explanations of the illness explained to you. What cultural variables are present?
- Assess the cultural relevant interpretations of social stressors, support systems, and levels of functioning
- Ask questions if you are unsure of things
- Stay away from making assumptions or judgments
- Be aware of cultural differences that may exist between you and the person