**Multicultural Competency in Counseling**

Culture is considered to be “…the configuration of learned behavior and results of behavior whose components and elements are shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society” (Linton, 1945:32) Culture exerts its influence in every part of one’s life. Therefore it is not surprise that it affects one’s health and health seeking behaviors.

Since culture has a strong sway on mental health there is a growing need to conduct more studies to ascertain the extent of its influence. It is very closely intertwined with mental health and the counseling field. So much so that multicultural and diversity considerations are included in the Code of Ethics of the American Counseling Association. We will briefly see some of the ways how the client’s and the clinician’s culture can effects the counseling process.

**Influence of the Client’s Culture:**

* Mental disorders such as Schizophrenia, depression and bipolar disorders are seen in people from all across the world. However the manifestation varies greatly according to age, gender, culture, race and ethnicity. It has also been found that clients from different cultures tend to be selective in expressing their symptoms in a more culturally accepted way. The Clinician needs to have multicultural competence to be able to overcome this challenge.
* The DMS –IV now includes Culture-bound syndrome which is a combination of psychiatric and somatic symptoms considered to be a recognizable disease only within a specific culture.
* Research has shown that culture influence the treatment seeking behavior of the client. It has been noted that members of the minority section. It is noted that some minority groups tend not to seek the help of mental health specialists but prefer informal sources of care like the clergy, traditional healers, and family and friends.
* There are finding that show that members of some minority groups have a feeling of mistrust. This mistrust can have cultural and racial roots.
* The method of communication also varies widely from culture to culture and must be taken to account.

**Influence of the Health Professional’s Culture:**

* The clinician has his/her own culture and worldview and brings this personal culture into the therapeutic setting. If the culture and worldview of the clinician and client is different then they may also have different assumptions of each other’s roles and pathology of the illness and the appropriate treatment options.
* The verbal and non verbal communication of the Health professional influences the counseling session and its success greatly. Communicating in a manner that is sensitive to the client’s culture will be very beneficial.
* The clinician can also harbor certain stereotype ideas and bias of the minority community which can lead to misdiagnosis and poor counseling outcomes. Therefore it is imperative that the clinician have multicultural competencies.

**Conclusion**

Thus we can see that culture has a very strong influence in the counseling process as it can manipulate both the mental health professional and the client. Research and growing knowledge in this field has produced substantial results such as the inclusion of the “Outline for Cultural Formulation” in the DSM-IV which deals with five aspects of the cultural context of mental illnesses and their application to diagnosis and interventions. Therefore it is imperative that the health care professional to have multicultural competencies in order to provide service to the highest standard.

By

Ms. Dinah Daniel Paki

Student counselor,

Andrews University,

Berrien springs, Michigan.