

PTSD 101

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COURSE TRANSCRIPT FOR:

PTSD: General Cross-Cultural Considerations

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Slide 1: PTSD: General Cross-Cultural Considerations

My name is Julia Whealin and I am Deputy Director of Education at the National Center for PTSD, Pacific Islands Division, part of the VA Pacific Islands Healthcare System. This presentation is a basic introduction for therapists who work with individuals in the aftermath of severe stressors.

Slide 2: After this presentation you should be able to:

After this presentation you should be able to define culture, describe cross-cultural awareness, explain how all people are really multicultural, and know that it is the therapist's duty to incorporate cultural differences into assessment and treatment.

Slide 3: After this presentation you should be able to:

After this presentation you should be able to understand that the types of severe stressors vary by culture, understand that interpretations of severe stressors vary by culture, understand that reactions to severe stressors vary by culture, and understand that ways of healing will vary by culture.

Slide 4: Part 1: Cross-Cultural Awareness

In Part I, I'm going to address the most important first step to working cross-culturally, that is cross-cultural awareness.

Slide 5: Part 1: Cultural Awareness

After Part I you should be able to define culture. You should be able to describe what it means by cross-cultural awareness. You should be able to understand multi-cultural identity. And you should know that it's the therapist's duty to incorporate cultural differences into assessment and treatment.

Slide 6: What is Culture? - Definition

What is culture? One of the best definitions of culture is that of Marcella who defined culture as "shared learned behavior and meanings that are socially transferred in various life activity

settings.” An example of learned behavior might be praying before a meal or whether couples should hold hands in public. An example of meaning might include notions about life or about death. For instance does dying mean that one might go to heaven or that one will be reincarnated? These are things we learn from those around us. They’re socially transferred. And secondly culture can be internal as in one’s attitudes or beliefs or culture can be external, consisting of roles or social structures outside of us.

Slide 7: What is Culture?

Culture includes people’s attitudes. Is it acceptable to put one’s individual needs ahead of the group needs? Is it acceptable for women to work outside of the home? These are examples of attitudes. Culture includes values. So within a culture what is the role of power or wealth? What is the role of children? Family? Community? Culture includes beliefs within a culture. What are the beliefs about birth? Spirituality? Suffering or death? And culture includes typical behaviors. So what is the appropriate dress for men? For women? What kind of eye contact do you use? What is the pace of a conversation?

Slide 8: Hoopes & Pusch, 1979

In summary culture entails complex multi-faceted and personal concepts having a profound though often out of consciousness impact upon persons.

Slide 9: What is Cross-Cultural Awareness?

Cross-cultural awareness is becoming aware of these things. It is the process of bringing unconscious culturally based assumptions and values to the surface or to our awareness. It’s the basic way of learning and becoming aware that our behavior and our thinking and our ways of perceiving the world are culturally conditions rather than being universal aspects of human behavior.

Slide 10: What is Cultural Self-Awareness?

Cultural self-awareness is simply having an understanding of one’s own cultural identity. To some people this comes naturally but to others it takes some effort. Understanding one’s own cultural identity is the most important first step in the process of becoming culturally competent. In summary, culture includes shared learned behavior and meanings that are socially transferred in various settings. When one’s perception of the world is not in his or her awareness that perception is not accessible to being understood or being influenced.

Slide 11: Cultural Identity

Now I’d like to discuss cultural identity. Early researchers describe cultural identity as either being acculturated or unacculturated. Acculturated with having adapted the major attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviors i.e. culture of the mainstream population.

Slide 12: U.S. Mainstream Culture

Now in this presentation when I speak of mainstream culture I'm speaking of the US's version of capitalism which is influenced by European American values. We know that mainstream culture in the US values competition, the nuclear family, heterosexuality, materialism, exploiting nature, and consumption. And these are values that are projected by the visual print in electronic media. US mainstream culture minimizes collectivism, the extended family, homosexuality, spirituality, being in harmony with nature, and preserving or conserving natural resources. And so how consistent is your cultural identity with the US mainstream culture?

Slide 13: Cultural Identity – Acculturated and Unacculturated

The terms acculturated and unacculturated were borrowed from anthropology. Researchers have described those who are unacculturated as not having adapted the major attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors of the mainstream population. However these concepts are ethnocentric. The concepts imply that the acculturation to Western or mainstream population is some type of goal and rarely we find that the terms acculturated and unacculturated are generalizations. We may have adopted some of the culture of mainstream USA but not others.

Slide 14: Cultural Identity

Most of us are in fact multi-cultural. Most of us have adapted attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors from various cultures and subcultures. And cultural differences include multiple variables such as age or gender or socioeconomic status.

Slide 15: Examples of Cultural Identities

Here are some examples of cultural identities. Nationality. Religion. Income. Age. Education. Sexual orientation. Mental or physical abilities. Gender. Profession. Ethnicity. Rural or Urban. Or, attractiveness.

Each person is uniquely tied to many cultural identities. And these cultural identities interact and influence one another. So in that sense we're all multicultural.

Slide 16: Identical Perspectives

We cannot assume that all people of a particular background share identical perspectives. A ten year old boy of a particular ethnicity who lives in a wealthy part of a city will not have the same views as a seventy-five year old woman of that same ethnicity who lives in a poor or rural community. Anytime we do not consider that each person may have several cultural identities we take the chance of misunderstanding our client.

Slide 17: Neurobiology of Trauma

Turning now to trauma we do know that there is a basic neurobiological reaction to severe stress. We find that neurobiological reactions to severe stressors are common throughout all cultures

and based in the physiology of human beings, however, manifestations of responses may differ significantly.

Slide 18: Therapist Responsibility

It's the therapist's responsibility to explore differences between the therapist and the client and to incorporate these into treatment.

Slide 19: Education Needed

Prior to working with a cultural group different than your own education is needed about a client's routine and traditions, family relationships and other factors that can impact the relationship in therapy.

Slide 20: Summary of Part 1

Culture includes the totality of socially transmitted learned behaviors and meaning. Our ways of thinking and behaving have been passed down by our parents or our communities and these typical behaviors and beliefs are learned. Cross-cultural awareness is the process of bringing culturally based assumptions and values to our awareness. And there a multi-cultural identity is one that has adapted attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors from various cultures. And that's basically all of us. We're all impacted by various unique aspects of our identities whether we're young or old, women or men, rich or poor. And it's our job as therapists to identify cultural differences and use them in assessment and treatment.

Slide 21: Part II – Cross-Cultural Responses

In Part II we will look at cross-cultural responses to severe stressors.

Slide 22: Cross-Cultural Responses

After Part II you should be able to identify how types of severe stressors vary by culture, identify how interpretations of severe stressors will vary by culture, recognize that reactions to severe stressors vary by culture, and recognize that ways of healing will vary by culture.

Slide 23: Those from other cultures may differ in:

So again those from other cultures may differ in the types of stressors they experienced, how they interpreted them, how they expressed their reactions to them, and how they heal. And I will now go over each of these four areas.

Slide 24: Stressors Vary by Culture

To begin with the types of severe stressors people experience will vary by culture. And this may seem simple but it's actually of a profound importance and that's because clinicians have

historically misdiagnosed clients by not fully realizing the type of range of severe stressors or chronic stressors and their histories.

Slide 25: Assessment of Stressors

When assessing a new client it's important to conduct a clinical interview that involves detailed life history narratives. And this is the only way to gain as full a picture as possible of all of the variables that need to be factored in to the diagnosis and the intervention. For example refugees from places like Africa or Southeast Asia are more likely to have been a prisoner of war or exposed to torture or to have suffered severe loss from immigration such as loss of home or family. A second example during the Vietnam War African Americans, Native Americans, and Native Hawaiians were exposed to greater amounts of combat than other groups. For many groups culturally sensitive assessment measures are available that can help the clinical interview. And so I also do recommend using culturally sensitive assessment measures as an adjunct to assessment.

Slide 26: Prior to working cross-culturally, clinicians should gain information regarding:

As mentioned in Part I, it's the therapist's duty to incorporate cultural differences into assessment and treatment. And therefore prior to working cross-culturally clinicians should gain information regarding the history of the culture, verbal and non-verbal communication, socio-political influences, the history including any issues such as oppression or prejudice and the routines and rituals of the culture.

Slide 27: Acknowledge Differences and Your Limitations:

Acknowledge differences and your limitations. Limitations may include difficulty speaking or understanding the language. It may be important to acknowledge differences and apologize for discrepancies between your behavior and the people with whom you're talking. Limitations may call for the assistance from interpreters although using interpreters will call for its own set of procedures.

Slide 28: Culture Interpretation of Meaning

The second area I want to address is culture interpretation of meaning. As mentioned earlier each person has a unique cultural outlook and it will be important to understand the meaning that a severe stressor has to a client or a group. The meaning is very important to eventual integration of the event into their lives.

Slide 29: Meaning of a Severe Stressor

What is the meaning of a severe stressor? Is it threatening or damaging to a person? Why did it happen? Is it a chance event or fate or the result of someone's actions? How does it change things? The meaning of the event will be influenced by cultural norms.

Slide 30: Case Example

A forty-nine year old Buddhist man living in rural India believes that a destructive earthquake provided him an opportunity to discharge karma through suffering and healing. These rural Indians believed that suffering during the disaster would lead to harmony and peace therefore the meaning of the disaster actually decreased the threat associated with the danger.

Slide 31: Case Example

Here's another example of the role of meaning. Case Example 2. Following the death of her son from cancer a thirty-three year old Caucasian woman who is a Baptist believed that God was punishing her for something she had done in her past. Many groups believe that God causes disasters or other traumatic events because of misdeeds. The meaning of the death in this case actually increased the traumatic impact of the event because it's tied to our own behavior. And so getting a good understanding of the meaning of an event is of utmost importance.

Slide 32: Third area – Expression of Reaction

Now we'll turn to the third area, expression of reaction. How one reacts to stressors and what the symptoms mean will vary according to the group norms.

Slide 33: Expression of Reactions

Expression of reaction. Western medicine has traditionally taken the Western conceptualization of trauma as the standard by which other cultures may vary. This is another example of ethnocentrism. We must instead learn to understand other cultural idioms of distress.

Slide 34: Cultural Explanations for Reactions

Norms for and explanations for reactions will vary by culture. Culture affects whether people express distress and how. Do they share emotions? Which ones? And how? Do they have a construct for any resultant affliction and how do they define it? It's important to understand the illness as perceived by the individual or by the community. And it's the therapist's job to frame the client's presenting problem according to the client's conceptualization and with consideration of the client's practical and concrete needs.

Slide 35: Clinical Assessment Methods

Clinical assessment methods have been particularly problematic for clients from non-Western backgrounds. The Department of Health and Human Services reports that non-Caucasian groups tend to receive less accurate diagnoses than Caucasian. Non-mainstream groups may not present classical symptoms of mental health disorders and may be diagnosed incorrectly. For example one study showed that African Americans with PTSD endorsed more items suggesting psychosis than Caucasians, which has led to misdiagnosis. In other cultures where open expression of emotional distress is not socially sanctioned traumatized clients may go undiagnosed. So

because of these problems clinicians need specialized training and competent assessment methods.

Slide 36: Case Example

Case Example 1. Following 9/11 a twenty-five year old second generation Japanese American EMT worker begins drinking alone nightly and avoids social contact with his family. He tells others he is fine even though he may be feeling great distress and suffering. There are cultures in which an individual will not accept himself as a victim or may think that others in the group will not accept them in that role. So here we have three cultural identities that might lend themselves to stoicism. First would be a traditional Japanese American culture. You might also have traditional EMT worker culture. And last is male gender culture. This client's cultural identities might result in a traumatic reaction going undetected and untreated.

Slide 37: Case Example

Case Example 2. Following a motor vehicle accident a Mexican immigrant experiences anxiety, hyperarousal, sleep disturbance, appetite loss, startle responses, headaches and stomachaches. When asked why he's feeling this way he reports he is suffering from susto and that his soul has left his body. Susto is one type of stress response syndrome typically found in Mexico, Central America, and South America. And during susto a frightening or life threatening event is thought to cause the soul to leave the body. And susto is one example of many culturally-bound stress responses. So in summary cultural norms and explanations for a reaction are important considerations in understanding a client.

Slide 38: Cultural Definition of Healing

Our last area is cultural definition of healing. Every culture has a means to deal with traumatic events and the individual or group's ways of healing are very important to the eventual integration of the event into their lives.

Slide 39: Cultural Definitions of Healing

Cultural Definitions of Healing. When working with other cultures it's important to express respect for the culture's stress and practices, for coping with severe stressors. It's important to find out about the individual's current preferences for and past experiences with care. An individual or group may need to conduct their own healing rituals following a disaster.

Slide 40: Case Example

Case Example 1. During therapy a fifty-two year old native Hawaiian Vietnam veteran says that his family traditionally seeks healing from a kahuna lapa au'. The kahuna conducts the Ho'oponopono ritual that enables the veteran and his family to resolve their problems.

Slide 41: Case Example

Case Example 2. A thirty-four year old African American Gulf War veteran has successfully decreased his PTSD symptoms in therapy but strong feelings of guilt remain. With encouragement he decides to discuss the moral implications of what he saw with his reverend. And after exploring his values with his reverend he begins to forgive himself for his actions overseas.

Slide 42: Modify Interventions or Role of the Clinician

Research has shown that some cultures respond positively to mainstream evidence based PTSD intervention. Others may not respond to that paradigm, however, and will prefer other healing methods. Interventions may have to be modified to accommodate other modes of healing or the role of the clinician may need to be modified. The role may be to facilitate the client's own healing path.

Slide 43: Culturally Based Healing Rituals

When appropriate culturally based healing rituals can be encouraged in consultation with and/or referral to spiritual practitioners relevant to the client's cultural and belief systems may be an important component of intervention.

Slide 44: Summary

Summary. Culture includes the totality of socially transmitted learned behaviors and meanings. Cross-cultural awareness is the process of bringing culturally based values to our awareness. All people are multi-cultural and it's the therapist's duty to include cultural differences in assessment and treatment.

Slide 45: Summary, Continued

The types of stressors that one experiences will vary according to the unique history of the culture. Interpretations of severe stressors will vary by culture. Reactions to severe stressors vary according to an individual's conceptualization of the experience. And ways of healing varies by culture. An individual group may need to conduct their own healing rituals following a trauma.

Slide 46: Selected Resources

Slide 47/48: Information about the National Center for PTSD Videos