

If interested, this topic can be learned in greater detail through a full day workshop called “Trauma Informed Classrooms.” Please contact Sara at sara@growingrootstherapy.ca or 204-333-9804 for more information or to book a workshop.

Being Trauma Sensitive

Cultural Beliefs & Mental Health

Stigma

- Attribute that makes a person different or “flawed”¹
- There are 2 types of stigma¹:
 - **Public stigma** – Society’s beliefs about a person that leads to a discriminatory response (i.e. beliefs about people with mental illness).
 - **Self-stigma** – Internalization of public stigma.
 - E.g. When a person who has/are experiencing mental health struggles due to trauma believes they are not worthy and will not want people to know they are a part of the stigmatized group, leading to decreased likelihood of them seeking help

Stigma & Culture

- Culture is the established values and norms shared by a group of people which determines behaviours; it includes the beliefs about what is acceptable in their society¹
- Mental illness stigma varies across cultures¹
 - There is an influence of culture on public and self mental illness stigma, especially (stigmatizing) beliefs about the cause of mental illness.
 - Stigma can occur as a result of some cultural groups’ experiences of injustices and mistreatment in the past by the government and/or the health care system.

Cultural Beliefs about Mental Health

People of Asian descent (Collectivist Cultures)¹

- Values: Conformity to norms, emotional self-control, collectivism, high achievement, family-centred (taking care of parents)
- Values’ influence on stigma
 - Mental illness is outside of norms
 - Seeking of treatment (i.e. counselling, which involves emotional expression) increases likelihood of stigmatization, since it can show personal weakness
 - People with mental illness can bring shame to the family as their parents are not reflected in a positive way

People of European ancestry (Western Culture)¹

- Values: Individualism, materialism, competition, orientation to future time
- Values' influence on stigma
 - Expectation of autonomy & being successful on one's own
 - Stigmatization of individuals who are dependent on others (i.e. people who have mental illnesses)
 - An individual with a mental illness who compares themselves to others is more likely to believe the stigmatizing beliefs from their society
 - Mental illness stigma is prevalent in this culture → some do not seek mental health services even though they know they need it

Why is this important?

- Cultural beliefs can determine help-seeking attitudes and guide behaviours²
 - Research indicates that where there are increased exposure of Western influences, it is more likely an individual with a mental illness will seek help
 - Clients with similar beliefs as their counsellors tend to trust them more and are more likely to seek mental health treatment
 - Children who has/are experiencing trauma may be more or less likely to seek support depending on their cultural beliefs and feelings of safety and trust
- It is important to be culturally competent and adapt treatment/interventions accordingly²
- Some ways to provide a safe classroom environment:
 - Make it a place where students are allowed to express what is safe and what is not safe for them, have a predictable structure/routine, set rules for the classroom that are clear and culturally sensitive, provide positive feedback consistently
 - When providing trauma-informed instruction: Be a secure base and build student's self-esteem, give instructions verbally and visually, and normalize failures and mistakes as an important part of learning

Resources

1. Abdullah, T., & Brown, T. (2011). Mental illness stigma and ethnocultural beliefs, values, and norms: An integrative review. *Clinical Psychology Review, 31*(6), 934–948. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2011.05.003>
2. Chen, S., & Mak, W. (2008). Seeking Professional Help: Etiology Beliefs about Mental Illness across Cultures. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 55*(4), 442–450. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0012898>

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