

# The Cultural Formulation Interview: A collaborative storytelling approach to Clinical Care

Session 4:  
Working with Families with the Cultural Formulation  
Interview  
April 29, 2022



South Southwest (HHS Region 6)

**MHTTC**

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

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I have no conflict of interest to declare





# Outline

- CFI and families: a useful tool and its limits
- Informing evaluation of individuals and families
- Improving interventions:
  - Strengthening clinical alliances,
  - Building on family resources,
  - Addressing structural problems

# The Cultural Formulation Interview

- Core CFI, subject and informant modules
- 12 supplementary modules: no module on family
- Family as a transversal dimension in all modules
- Pros : family permeates all the key domains of experience, explanatory models, coping, help-seeking
- Cons: working with families entails layers of complexity which are not modeled in the CFI
- CFI is not a way to assess families, but provide a tool which can support family assessments and interventions



# What is a family for you?




# Family: Definitions

- Nuclear vs extended
- But also: patriarchal vs matriarchal, patrilinear vs matrilinear... « It is to be noted... »
- Blood relations vs Emotional/Social relations  
« Its my auntie,...My brother »
- Generational relations and the law: legality vs legitimacy ?
- Families in evolution: source of social tensions



# Families in society

- Familial and societal burning issues:
    - Gender relations
    - Children's rights
    - Youth confidentiality
    - Autonomy as a core value
    - Interdependence as emmeshment
    - “Zero tolerance for violence”
- 







# Gender Relations:

No prejudices...

- The shadow of the “crime of honour”
- Cinderella revisited
- Decoding women’s “submissiveness”
- Arranged marriage
- Masculinity and white supremacists
- Gender dysphoria as an idiom of distress?



# Evaluation

- CFI in family assessments: enriching data collection and interpretation
- Introducing a family perspective: from a patient/informant perspective to a plural perspective
- A « Prism » assessment: Who should you interview?
- Which modules/ questions should you use : identity, explanatory models, coping or help-seeking ?
- Thoroughness is impossible, but complexity is key
- Bad reasons for not reaching out: « Grand-father is in Africa »; « His wife does not speak English » , « She is too young.. »



# Evaluation: unfolding identities

- From the centration on a unique identity:  
National (Sri Lanka), ethnic (Tamil), religious (Hindu)
- To the exploration of significant plural identities:  
Family from Rwanda, Muslim, mixed Hutu-Tutsi,

Intersectionality as a dynamic process, associated with family relations and developmental phases

# Evaluation: unfolding meaning

- Tin a 6 y.o chinese boy referred by the school for elective mutism
- The compliant parents seeking psychological help for a disorder
- The unspoken transgenerational trauma in Pol Pot camps
- Silence as resilience?

# Evaluation: understanding family relations

- A young Senegalese woman is the third wife of an old uneducated man
- Clinicians assume that the family dysfunction comes from the traditional marriage
- CFI reveals that she comes from a high status family, is educated and has family abroad
- Thinking about a family secret?
- Working with the gaps in the family story




# Evaluation: looking at our biases

- Rose is an 11 yo Canadian
- Mother is pro-vaccination and terrified of the COVID virus
- Father believes the virus has been invented to control people and is opposed to Rose vaccination
- Grand-parents think that...
- Mother is asking your help



# CFI and family intervention: usefulness?

- Improving alliance and cultural safety
  - Mobilizing family and community strengths
  - Choosing therapeutic interventions and adapting them
  - Strengthening multi-actor coordination in the treatment plan
- 



# The Alliance: A Story of the Turkish Coffee


- A 7 year old boy with an autism diagnosis
- First family meeting with grandparents
- Previous failure of intervention with father (probable Asperger's)
- Presentation of the team and welcoming of the family
- The grandfather demand: “Now, I need to have coffee”







# The Turkish Coffee

- Evocation of the rules of hospitality by the therapist and offer to get coffee
  - The grandfather's decision
  - The respect of the patriarch's role
  - The involvement of the family
  - One year later...
- 



# Can a Good Alliance Lead to an Intervention Failure?

- A Somali adolescent in youth protection
- Placed in a closed facility
- Diagnosis of Tourette Syndrome
- A meeting with the family and youth protection
- The therapist's attempt to uncover institutional racism





# Can a Good Alliance Lead to an Intervention Failure?

- The split with youth protection
- “When the mother will understand, she will agree with us”
- The institutional retaliation
- A team reflection

# Mohammed: A Father's Curse

- 15 year-old Ethiopian
- Diagnosis of acute psychosis in emergency
- Separated from mother for nine years
- Sent to Canada by father as retaliation
- Duration of illness 6 months
- Mother: medical illness
- Sister: evokes spirit possession in younger brother

# Treatment

- Questionable efficacy of neuroleptics
- Traditional healer: re-establish bond with mother  
– renewal of ties with father's lineage
- Reconnection with both sides of family:
  - Father's twin sister's blessing
  - Going regularly to the mosque with paternal cousins
- Building bridges between his two worlds

# AWA – Becoming a Woman in a Strange World

- Hospitalized Catatonic picture
- OPD follow up by psychiatric nurse
  - Do you have children?
  - Do you believe in ghosts?
  - The adolescent ward: father has a personality disorder, mother is enmeshed
  - Activating transnational networks





# AWA – Becoming a Woman in a Strange World


- Transfer to adult services
  - A last home visit
  - They don't know anything about black magic
  - Bipolar? Who cares...
  - “This is a very good answer”
  - Mother's last gift: a story



PHOTO : REUTERS / BRENDAN MCDERMID  
RADIO-CANADA 2020,08,26

# Tom the school shooter

- 15 y.o boy referred by the police
- Racist, misogynist, homophobic and anti-semitic online posts
- Father unemployed, fascinated by W War II
- Mother has achievement dreams for Tom
- Learning difficulties
- Caught between the cultures of American utopia and the youth dystopia?



**« Power cannot be given, It should be  
taken... »**

**Elena de la Aldea**

- Recognizing family strengths can be a threatening adventure for clinicians
  - Fear of losing control
  - Fear of being blamed for innovative practices
  - Fear of transgressing societal premises
  
- Supporting family resources is key to healing and recovery

# Conclusion

- CFI can be used to support culturally sensitive family evaluation and intervention
- It is not a simple tool and do not replace family intervention training
- Weaving the collected information together in a formulation requires experience and a team
- It maybe be an avenue to think outside the box when confronted with intervention failures
- It invites us to think: What do I miss or ignore? What do I take for granted ?Could I do things differently ?







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