Cultural Adaptation of Family Therapy in the Cultural Context of Iran

Manijeh Daneshpour, Ph.D. LMFT

Distinguished Professor

Systemwide Director of Marriage and Family Therapy Program

Alliant International University

mdaneshpour@alliant.edu

The Foundation of Family Therapy

- Family: a system of interconnected lives governed by strict but unspoken rules.

- What brings people to therapy: aggravation and unhappy relationships- with friends and family.

Psychotherapeutic Sanctuary

- The two most influential approaches to psychotherapy in the 20th century: Freud's psychoanalysis and Roger's client centered therapy were both predicated on the assumption that psychological problems arose from unhealthy interactions with others and could best be alleviated in a private relationship between therapist and patient.

Family versus Individual Therapy

- They each offer two things: <u>an approach to treatment</u> and a <u>way of understanding human behavior</u>.

- Individual therapists believe that people will internalize the influence of their families and so we don't need to have them in the room.

- Family therapists believe that the dominant forces are located externally, in the family.

- When family organization is transformed, the life of its members is altered accordingly. So changing the family changes the life of its members.

Psychology and Social Context

- The choice between individual and family therapy also reflects a philosophical understanding of human nature.

- For years psychotherapy split human problems into one or two categories: <u>intrapsychic</u> or <u>interpersonal</u> –<u>individual</u> or <u>family</u>. Now many family therapists treat individuals and recognize the impact of psychopathology and psychodynamic.

- Family therapy is an **<u>orientation</u>** not a technique, so there is no contradiction in doing family therapy with just one person in the room.

Cultural Influences on Family Functions

- There is no official theory associated with understanding culture…but there is a concept of cultural competence that leads practitioners to actively consider cultural influences in understanding and responding to family situations.

- Culture is central to family life; nevertheless it is often omitted from family counseling/therapy/interventions

Gathering Cultural Knowledge--- A Real Challenge!!

- First, you must acquire knowledge about a culture. But this gathering of information can result in stereotyping because info sources provide commonly shared traits…

- Second, one must temper the acquired knowledge with an appreciation of diversity within the cultural group.

- Third, family practitioners must apply their cultural knowledge to theoretical frameworks and understandings of what is "normal."

Tripartite Development of Family Identity

- **Individual level**: "All families are, in some respects, like no other families."
- **Group Level**: " All families are, in some respects, like some other families."
- **Universal Level**: " All families are, in some respects, like all other families."

What is Healthy/Normal?

- Family dynamics are culturally different.
- Insight is not valued in all cultures.
- Independence and self sufficiency are not valued in all cultures.
- DSM diagnosis of mental illness create unhealthy categories for behavior

Western Psychology

- Belief in superiority (more advanced, more civilized)
- Belief in the inferiority of others (less intelligent, less qualified)
- Power to impose standards
- Manifestation of monoculturalism
- The invisible colonialism (unintentional and unconscious)

Family Therapy Fundamental Concepts

- Interconnectedness
- Sequence of interaction
- Triangles
- Circular sequences
- Indirect communication
- Family structure

Culture and Parenting

- Parenting functions vary considerably depending on cultural influences!

- Most family practitioners observe differences in discipline strategies and nurturing across families.

- When working with family systems, we have to pay attention to the family culture, religion, collectivistic values, and controlling children

Cultural Influences on Guidance Functions

- Parents must explain to their children the relationship between the family culture and the dominant culture.

- Values and religious influences of the cultural group.

Roles and Expectations

- Culture heavily influences social, family, and gender roles through culturally determined expectations of how such roles should be performed. Every culture has a model of the ideal family!!!

- Culturally bound role expectations of family members influence nurturing functions in the family.

- In some cultures, males do very little nurturing, but they may remain the ultimate authority when discipline is applied.

- In other cultures, tasks within the home are more evenly distributed.

Systemic Approaches in Iranian Cultural Context

- Culture: What is the cultural identity of the family? (religion, socioeconomic status, ethnicity).

- Communication: What are the communication patterns and meta rules?

- Life Cycle: What is the developmental stage of the family? (launching children, empty nest, married without children etc.)

Systemic Interventions with Iranian Families

- First impressions are important, and you need to be perceived as accessible to everyone, knowledgeable, confident and calm.

- It is important to note where each family member sits and how the family interacts.

- Joining the Family: You need to try to build a connection with every family member without showing favoritism or bias toward one over another.

Family Systems Therapy

Multi-Level
Multi-Contextual
Multi-Family
Multi-Perspective

Family Therapy is the most effective way to work with Iranian families.