

Culture, context and psychiatric diagnosis:

A manual for interviewing according to the Cultural Formulation in DSM-IV [Translated from the Swedish]

The Transcultural Centre in Stockholm has developed a manual with guidelines for conducting clinical interviews to produce a cultural formulation according to DSM-IV-TR. This appendix to the article (Bäärnhielm and Rosso 2009), provides a translation of the questions and probes suggested for an interview to elicit information for a cultural formulation following the DSM-IV guidelines.

The first part of the manual in Swedish includes the following sections:

- Aim of the Cultural Formulation
- When to use it
- Culture, context and psychopathology
- Cultural perspectives in DSM-IV
- How the manual was developed
- Ethnographically based interviewing
- Explanations of the sections of the Cultural Formulation
- Practical considerations concerning interviewing
- Suggested questions for a clinical interview

The section on “Ethnographically based interviewing” discusses the importance of the patient’s point of view and of the social context as complementary strategies for psychiatric interviewing.

Reference: Bäärnhielm, S. & Rosso, M.S. (2009). The cultural formulation: a model to combine nosology and patients’ life context in psychiatric diagnostic practice. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 46 (3).

Suggested questions for a clinical interview using the cultural formulation

Adjust language and choice of words to the person you are interviewing. The order in which the questions are posed can vary. Be sensitive to and respect the patient's boundaries regarding what he/she wishes to talk about. Check with the patient to insure that you have understood correctly. Repeat questions when necessary.

*Refer to those persons that the patient mentions.

**Use the geographic reference that the patient gives.

***Use the term for group affiliation that the patient uses, in the case of affiliation with several groups ask about each of them.

Cultural explanations of the individual's illness – expression and meaning

First a few questions about your problems. (*“Problems” is a gloss of “besvär” in Swedish. There is no English concept clearly corresponding to “besvär” which includes connotations of suffering and discomfort that can be bodily, mental, or social.*)

- What sort of problems do you have?
- How serious do you think your problems are?
- What words do you usually use when you talk with your family, relatives, or friends about your problems? By all means use your mother tongue.
- Do you know anyone who has had similar problems?
- What do you believe can be the cause of your problems?
- What sort of help and treatment do you want?
- What sort of help and treatment have you sought?

- It you had stayed in your country of origin, what sort of help and treatment would you have asked for?
- What does your family, relatives and those around you* (family, friends, co-workers) say about your problems?
- How serious do they think your problems are?
- What words do they* use when talking about your problems? By all means tell me in the language they use.
- What do they* believe can be the cause of your problems?
- What sort of help and treatment do they* think you should seek?
- One can seek help for problems in various ways. Have you tried other ways than the healthcare services in Sweden? (Give examples of traditional medicine, alternative medicine and healthcare in the home country that can be relevant for the patient).

Migration and acculturation

I shall now ask some questions about your move to Sweden (*if relevant*).

- Where** do you come from?
- Why did you leave your neighbourhood/town/country**?
- How did you come to Sweden?

Pose follow-up questions about the migration and possible flight (respect boundaries regarding what the patient is prepared to talk about).

- What made you move to Sweden in particular?
- How has your life been affected by the move to Sweden?

Pose follow-up questions about life in the home country (e.g. work, housing, socio-economic status).

- What did you leave behind when you moved to Sweden?
- Which important people did you leave?
- What contact do you have with your old neighbourhood**?
- What contact do you have with family and friends who still live there?
- Do you visit your old neighbourhood?
- What new relationships have you made in Sweden?
- What new opportunities have you had in Sweden?

Pose follow-up questions about work, education, housing and other current conditions.

- How has your family been affected by the move?
- Has the move to Sweden affected your health? (*Pose follow-up questions about how the patient perceives the situation.*) In what way?
- Were you subjected to threats or violence in your neighbourhood**?
- Were you subjected to threats or violence on the way to Sweden?
- How has this affected you? (*If relevant.*)
- Were your relatives subjected to threats or violence in your neighbourhood**?
- Were your relatives subjected to threats or violence on the way to Sweden?
- How has this affected your relatives? (*If relevant.*)
- How has this affected you? (*If relevant.*)
- Do you often think of your neighbourhood** and the past?
- What are your expectations and hopes regarding the future?

Cultural identity of the individual

I shall now ask some questions about your cultural, ethnic, and religious background and affiliation.

- Are there any group or groups that are important to you? I am thinking of, for example, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, social, or other groups. *(Give examples if needed).*
- Do you think of yourself as ___ ? *(Exemplify with ethnic group, e.g. "Kurdish" or response given).*
- Do you think of yourself as Swedish?
- How do you think that others see you? *(Exemplify if needed using earlier responses).*
- What does the group*** mean to you?
- What is it like to belong to several groups***? *(If relevant.)*
- What problems does it create?
- What opportunities does it create?
- Has your experience of belonging to a particular group*** changed over time?
- What has this meant for you? *(If relevant.)*
- Is there anything you miss?
- Is there anything that has given you new opportunities?
- How is your group *** treated by those in your surroundings?
- Have you experienced misunderstandings or been subjected to unfair treatment because of your group affiliation****?

- Is there any group, or several groups, that are important to your family? I am thinking, for example, of national, ethnic, cultural, and social or other groups. (*Exemplify if needed*).
- What does the group *** mean to your family?
- How does it work for your family belonging to several groups***? (*If relevant.*)

I shall now ask some questions about your language use.

- What languages can you speak?
- What language do you prefer to use?
- In which situations do you use the different languages, at home, with the family, at work, in contact with healthcare services?
- When did you learn to speak the different languages?
- In what language do you dream?

Cultural factors related to psychosocial environment and levels of functioning

I shall now ask some questions about how your problems affect you.

- How do your problems affect your everyday life? (*Exemplify if needed with everyday activities.*)
- How do your problems affect your contacts with others? (*For example, family, friends, colleagues, etc.*)
- How do your problems affect your ability to be active?
- How do your problems affect your ability to cope at home?
- How do your problems affect your ability to work?
- Is there anything in your everyday life that contributes to, or has contributed to, you having problems?

- What affects you now, or has affected you in the past? (*If relevant.*)
- How have you been affected?

I shall now ask some questions about what you can receive in terms of advice, support, and help.

- Is there anyone, or any persons, that you trust and can talk with about your problems and your situation?
- Are you able to talk with your family and your relatives about your problems?
- Are there any difficulties in doing so?
- How do you let others know that you need help?
- What sort of help do you need in your everyday life?
- From whom can you receive advice, support, and help in your everyday life?
- What sort of advice, support, and help can you receive in your everyday life?
- Do you have a faith or belong to a religious community that is a support and help for you?
- What sort of advice, support, and help do you receive? (*If relevant.*)

Cultural elements of the relationship between the individual and the clinician

In conclusion, I will ask several questions about what you think about this interview and your contact with this unit (clinic, health care institution).

- What has it been like to describe and explain your problems and your situation to me?
- What has it meant for you to be able/not able to use your mother tongue with me?
- What has it been like using an interpreter during our conversation? (*If relevant.*)

- Did you need an interpreter? (*If relevant.*)
- What do you think about the questions I have asked?
- Is there anything important that you would like to tell me that we have not discussed?
- What has been easy to explain?
- What has been difficult to explain?
- How well do you think that I have understood your problems and your situation?
- How well do you think that others at this unit have understood your problems and your situation?

Assessment

Finally the interviewer assesses the interview. Questions to consider are listed below.

- What was the relationship with the patient like?
- What has made it difficult/easy to form a good relationship?
- What was the communication like?
- What has made it difficult/easy to create good communication?
- How has the language worked during the session?
- What has it meant that you do not have the same mother tongue? (*If relevant.*)
- What has it meant that you have used an interpreter?
- Did you need an interpreter?
- What was the level of intimacy?
- What has made it difficult/easy to attain an adequate level of intimacy?
- How do you assess your possibility of understanding the patient's problems?

- What has made understanding more difficult/easy?
- How do you assess your possibility of understanding the patient's life situation and social context?
- What has made understanding more difficult/easy?
- How do you assess your possibility of understanding the patient's self-image and expectations of the healthcare services?
- What has made understanding more difficult/easy?
- What feelings and reactions has the patient awoken in you?
- How have you managed your feelings and reactions?
- How do you assess your possibility to decide what is normal and pathological with regard to the patient's problems?
- How reliable do you think your diagnostics are? Regarding categorisation (Axes I and II)?
- Regarding other DSM-IV Axes?
- How do you assess your possibility of suggesting an adequate treatment?
- How do you assess your possibility of making your diagnostic assessment comprehensible for the patient?
- What is the importance of your and the patient's ethnic, social, and cultural affiliations in your encounter? (Reflect upon what you believe that these factors have had for significance in your encounter).
- Other reflections?

Overall cultural assessment for diagnosis and care

In conclusion, an assessment is made of how cultural aspects affect diagnostics and suggestions to the patient regarding care.