

NCCTS Leadership:

Culture and Trauma

Culture can broadly be defined as a dynamic pattern of language, beliefs, values, rituals, and customs that characterize specific racial, ethnic, religious, or social groups.¹ Promoting trauma-informed treatments and services in a culturally competent manner is essential to meeting the mission of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN): To raise the standard of care and improve access to services for traumatized children, their families, and communities throughout the United States.

Culture and trauma have a profound bidirectional influence on each other. Culture shapes attitudes towards traumatic experiences (e.g., sexual abuse, illness, accidents, physical abuse) as well as how children and families respond to—and recover from—trauma exposure. To address these complex issues, culturally competent service providers need to:

- Have a defined set of values, principles, policies, and structures that enable them to work effectively cross-culturally
- Value diversity and demonstrate the skills needed to acquire cultural knowledge and adapt to the cultural contexts of the communities they serve
- Incorporate the above in all aspects of their organization’s policies, administration, and practice, while systematically involving consumers and key stakeholders within their communities

While culturally competent trauma treatment and practices are increasingly recognized as necessary for quality care, a gap remains in the amount and quality of data available on trauma exposure among children from diverse cultural groups. The little research that exists tends to focus solely on ethnicity and race, while the role of culture is much more complex, especially as it relates to trauma.

In exploring the impact of trauma on diverse cultural groups, it is important that terms such as culture, race, and ethnicity do not become proxies for other variables, such as socioeconomic status or acculturation. To this end, the National Center for Child Traumatic Stress (NCCTS) and NCTSN have adopted a broad view of culture. NCTSN’s initiatives on cultural competence seek to capture the complexity of these issues and to include representatives of populations that are often excluded from discussions of race and ethnicity, such as youth with disabilities (e.g., deaf and hard of hearing); homeless youth; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered youth; religious and spiritual youth; and youth living in rural areas.

NCCTS is dedicated to infusing cultural competence into every level of its initiatives, by developing products and resources that highlight a diversity of populations and their specific cultural needs.

Accomplishments and Results

NCCTS has developed a comprehensive annotated bibliography of resources on culture and trauma, to help Network members and the public increase their knowledge of culture and trauma. Posted on the NCTSN website (www.NCTSN.org), the bibliography includes general resources on cultural competence, as well as more focused resources about specific populations and topics.

A part of an initiative to infuse cultural competency throughout the programs and activities of NCCTS and Network, NCCTS engaged the consulting firm to conduct a cultural needs assessment. As a result, NCCTS has:

- Established the NCTSN culture listserv, a mechanism for creating an online community of Network members who have an interest in culture and trauma. The culture listserv will enable an ongoing dynamic dialogue on cultural competence, allowing the Network's understanding of cultural competence to evolve along with its changing needs, the needs of the training agencies, treatment populations, and the theoretical understandings of cultural competence. The culture listserv also serves as a source for consultation on issues related to culture and trauma.
- Created the NCTSN Culture Consortium, a committee to monitor and advance the Network's commitment to cultural competence and serve as the umbrella group for subgroups working on specific populations or topics (e.g., the Race and Urban Poverty Group, Translations Group, American Indian Group, and the Adaptations for Latinos Group).
- Launched the NCTSN *Culture and Trauma Briefs Series* to increase knowledge and awareness about the bidirectional impact of culture and trauma and promote culturally competent trauma-informed practices. Topics include:
 - Trauma among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or questioning youth
 - Guidelines for translating resources
 - Trauma among homeless youth
 - Organizational self-assessment for cultural and linguistic competence
 - Working with traumatized Latino/Hispanic children and their families
 - Cultural and family differences in children's sexual education and knowledge
 - Addressing the mental health problems of border and immigrant youth

NCCTS initiatives seek to infuse cultural competency throughout the Network.

Culture and Trauma

- Organized the NCTSN *Culture and Trauma Speaker Series* that builds on the *Culture and Trauma Briefs Series* by providing in-depth presentations on specific topics with the goal of helping clinicians and other participants develop skills. The *Culture and Trauma Speaker Series* features 12 presentations archived on the NCTSN Learning Center for Child and Adolescent Trauma website (<http://learn.nctsn.org>):
 - *Organizational Assessment and Staff Training in Cultural Competence*
 - *Trauma among Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Youth*
 - *Addressing the Trauma Treatment Needs of Children Who are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing and the Hearing Children of Deaf Parents*
 - *Working with Homeless and Runaway Youth*
 - *The Traumatic Experiences of Border and Immigrant Youth*
 - *American Indian Youth: Current and Historical Trauma*
 - *Child and Adolescent Refugee Mental Health*
 - *Child Trauma, “Race” and Urban Poverty*
 - *Trauma Treatment Needs of Children and Families in Rural Communities*
 - *Adapting Trauma-Focused Treatments for Culturally Diverse Populations*
 - *Spirituality and Child Trauma*
- Wrote *Trauma-Informed Interventions: Clinical and Research Evidence and Culture-Specific Information Project* in partnership with the National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center at the Medical University of South Carolina. The book identifies 22 trauma-informed treatment interventions, developed and utilized with trauma-affected youth populations of various cultural backgrounds, and provides a general and culture-specific fact sheet for each. The fact sheets describe interventions adapted for use with specific cultural groups, and present the supporting clinical and research evidence. The book is designed to help mental health practitioners, policy makers, researchers, educators, and clinicians choose appropriate treatments for the diverse populations they serve.
- Funded five small projects to enhance cultural competence, including four skills-based resources that address the bidirectional impact of culture and trauma for clinicians and consumers:
 - *My Identity, My SELF: Addressing the Needs of LGBTQ Youth in Sanctuary Informed Residential Treatment*
 - Culturally competent childhood traumatic grief educational materials for children in military families
 - Spanish adaptation of childhood traumatic grief video and glossary of preferred Spanish terms

- Community dialogue and needs assessment for addressing traumatic stress among resettled refugee youth in New Hampshire

Vision for the Future

In late 2009, NCCTS will complete and disseminate a web-based engagement tool for African American families.

While the *Culture and Trauma Briefs Series* and *Culture and Trauma Speaker Series* have reached many child-serving professionals, the NCTSN Culture Consortium has identified further dissemination as a key goal.

The Culture Consortium will lead in the creation of a more systematic method for evaluating the quality of translated materials. Additionally, the Consortium will update the Spanish section of the NCTSN website, including reviewing current materials on the site, identifying new resources, and making necessary layout changes.

Since cultural competence is a developmental process that evolves over time, NCCTS has launched a staff diversity training plan as the next phase of the cultural needs assessment, which began with a formal training on culture, diversity, and inclusion. Future plans include continuing the dialogue about culture, trauma, and cultural competence through staff meetings and a brown bag presentation series with Network and local experts.

References

1. National Center for Cultural Competence. (2001). *Definitions of culture*. Washington, DC: National Center for Cultural Competence. Retrieved April 28, 2009, from <http://www.ncccurricula.info/awareness/C5.html>