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# INTERCULTURAL CARE IN THE SOCIAL AND HEALTHCARE SECTOR (I-CARE)

## MODULE 8: DEALING WITH PAIN

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## Project Information

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## KEY TO SYMBOLS

	<b>ACTIVITY</b>		<b>TRAINER'S NOTES</b>		<b>SUMMARY</b>
	<b>TRAINER INPUT</b>		<b>ACTION PLAN</b>		

## Introduction

This module explores attitudes to dealing with pain across different cultures.

### Module Aims and Objectives

The purpose of this module is for learners to explore:

- different aspects of pain
- different experiences of pain
- different cultural expectations of how pain should be dealt with
- how pain is expressed in different cultures

### Learning Outcomes

After studying this module, you will be able to:

- ◆ Understand different aspects of pain
- ◆ Understand the patient related factors that differentiate pain across different cultures
- ◆ Apply a Culturally Sensitive Pain Assessment Tool
- ◆ Reflect on real life inter-cultural problems

### Understanding, Skills and Competences developed:

- ◆ Increased Intercultural awareness.
- ◆ Enhancement of life skills
- ◆ Better developed social skills when working across cultures
- ◆ Personal skills in working across cultures
- ◆ Increased level of competence in working in multi-cultural environments.

### Training method applied/ What you have to do

This module is available as e-learning and also can be delivered face-to-face in a classroom, or with a class via a virtual platform.



It involves

- ◆ Reading background information on the subject of the module.
- ◆ Completion of exercises and activities either by e-learning or attending a face-face course, or via a virtual platform.
- ◆ Self-assessments for reflection and checking understanding

**Duration: 2 hours**

### Further Reading

You will also find a range of supporting resource materials available in the [I-CARE Toolbox](#) and on the [I-CARE App](#).



## Section 1: Dealing with Pain



Trainer Input (slide 3)



Trainer's notes (slides 3, 4)



Activity – How do you describe pain? (slide 4)

- Indigestion caused by eating rich food.

- Banging your elbow on a door frame.
- A headache which makes you need to lie down.
- Cutting your finger on a sharp knife.



Trainer input (slides 5, 6, 7, 8)

### Describing Pain

Describing pain is subjective and it can be difficult to find the right words. How we describe pain, the words and terminology we use is part of who we are. How we deal with pain, and the expectations of others about how we deal with it, is part of our upbringing and therefore part of our culture. Pain is a universal feeling. It helps humans recognize threats or problems regarding their body. Although pain is a natural function all human beings feel, it is also a cultural experience. Culture influences the way people experience pain, the way they perceive and respond to pain, as well as how they communicate it to others. (*BODY Culture, Body, Gender, Sexuality in Adult Trainings, 2013*).

:

**Pain** is a biological, psychological and social phenomenon. **Pain control** influences the quality of life. **Pain experience** is how we perceive and manifest pain. It includes thoughts, feelings, reactions, expectations, and past experiences associated with pain. **Pain expression** includes verbal and nonverbal behaviour regarding pain. This varies in different cultures.

**Pain and Culture:** In some cultures, individuals tend to express their pain, to share it with others (e.g. Mediterranean, Middle East), while in others (e.g. Confucian cultures) they suppress it and keep it to themselves. Tolerance to pain also changes over time and as cultures evolve. **EXAMPLE:** *The English author Fanny Burney in 1808 offered to hold her own cancerous breast while the surgeon removed it without anesthetic, because these were the cultural expectations at that time.* Today, we try to find a way to remove pain.



Trainer's notes (slides 9, 10)





After you have talked about how we describe pain and introduced the idea of pain in different cultures, ask the learners to choose a statement that they most identify with from the list; or you can simply ask learners to put up their hands when you read out the statement that they most identify with. Then ask them to complete the next activity and lead a discussion about why they chose this one and if they think that this could be influenced by the culture that they belong to. Then lead a class discussion about different ways of expressing pain and how they feel about those who express pain differently to themselves



#### Activity – Your experiences of pain. (slide 9)

Think back to when you were a child. What were the expectations of how you dealt with any pain you had, by the adults caring for you?

*Choose the statement that applies to you the most.*

- a. I had to tolerate it and not make a fuss.
- b. I was encouraged to freely express the pain.
- c. I was told to accept it as an inevitable part of life.



#### Activity - Expectations of dealing with pain. (slide 10)

What are the expectation of how individuals dealt with pain, within your family and peer group?

*Mark the statement with which you most associate.*

- a. Pain was not talked about or discussed.
- b. If someone was in pain they were encouraged to freely describe it.
- c. If someone was in pain they would moan loudly in order to demonstrate they were in pain and that they were suffering.
- d. If someone was in pain they were expected to suffer in silence and not make any fuss.



Summary (slide 11)



## Section 2: Broad Differentiations Between Cultures



(Trainer’s Notes (slides 13, 14, 15))

Two broad ways of expressing and enduring pain is expressive vs stoic behaviour. The ways that people express their pain differ and can be sociocultural determined. One distinction that can be made is between the expressive and the stoic way of expressing or enduring pain: Expressive people tend to express the pain to the outside world for others to understand. Stoic people tend to accept pain more silently. Stoic attitudes may connect with cultural or religious beliefs such as “It was God’s will to test me in that way and I have to endure it.”.



Trainer’s notes (slide 16)



Activity (slide 16)

Thinking about your own cultural background has influenced the way you deal with both your own and others pain.

Not influenced it at all.

Has had a strong influence on it.

I deal with my own and other’s pain in a stoic

I deal with my own and other’s pain in an expressive way



## Section 3: Pain Across Cultures



This section is about giving the learners information and allowing them to ask questions and to contribute with their own experience and knowledge.



In some cultures, pain and expression of pain is thought to be a personal failure and a weakness, and pain is perceived as a consequence of behaviour. Pain is also seen as private, and an effort is made not to burden family members and friends. In some countries and cultures people attribute a meaning to pain, trying to rationalize and cope with pain. For example, in Hindu culture, where a belief in karma is a common, it is sometimes thought that suffering is a result of past thoughts and actions. This belief promotes acceptance of the pain. Acceptance of the pain is associated with better quality of life, especially for those who suffer from chronic pain. Coping mechanisms refer to the ways in which someone attempts to reduce the physical, emotional and psychological impact that comes from very stressful events. (Pillay et al., 2015). These can range from:

**Active coping mechanisms:** self-control, ignoring pain, using active coping self-statements, a general sense of internal locus of control. They tend to be associated with better long-term adjustment (Sharma et al., 2018).

**Passive coping mechanisms:** praying, hoping, diverting thoughts

There are of course different attitudes to pain across cultures.

In some Arabic cultures, pain is viewed as unpleasant and is expressed clearly, metaphors or sensory descriptors are often used to describe it (ice, fire, like a knife), and pain will be expressed in front of family members.



.In some European cultures pain is endured 'stoically' and is often hidden whereas other European cultures express pain and share their experience openly with others. In some Asian cultures: sickness is seen as a result of imbalance in the yin and yang, it is common to use herbs, oils, massage, and it may be that pain is shared more openly with others from the same culture, some favour no expressions of pain, emotional displays can be seen as a character weakness.

In some South American cultures: men are expected to suffer stoically, expression of pain is seen as self-help, folk medicine and prayer is often used for healing.

## Section 4 Accessing Services



Begin this section by asking learners if they believe that everyone can access services equally. Ask them what are the things that might stop people accessing health services and facilitate a class discussion. Finish the discussion by adding to it with the information below as appropriate.



Research has shown that some people in some cultures have little trust in healthcare services (Defrin et al., 2011) . This is a barrier to effective and appropriate management of disease. Some minority groups do not readily seek help and are reluctant to participate in pain care programmes (Carey et al.,2010)

Language barriers and literacy issues:

Low literacy levels are a significant barrier when asking for help from healthcare systems. (Ruehlman et al., 2005).

The use of cultural descriptors can lead to a misunderstanding of a patient's health condition and potential problems.

- Lower socioeconomic status and migratory backgrounds are linked to inequalities in healthcare provision and inefficient communication between healthcare providers and patient

## Section 5 Intercultural Communication and Pain



### Intercultural communication and healthcare

It is impossible for healthcare providers to be aware of and understand all the differences amongst cultures regarding pain and its control. It is important to ask patients about their belief systems and let them know that they are accepted, and that care can be adjusted. In doing so, a “cultural clash” of different belief systems will be avoided (Free M., 2002).

Steps to providing a culturally sensitive service. These are the steps to put into place:

1. Observe carefully.
2. Investigate the meaning of pain to each person within a cultural framework.
3. Keep in mind that some cultural beliefs can prevent participation in plan of care.
4. Interpret diverse behavioural responses.
5. Provide culturally competent care options



Divide the learners into small groups and ask them to discuss some useful questions they might ask to find out more about someone’s pain. At the end of the exercise each group should have 5 questions that they will share with the whole group and then discuss which ones out of all of them they think would get the best answers. Then show the group the Culturally Sensitive Pain Assessment Tool and match the questions they devised to these.



### Activity

Discuss and write down 5 questions you could ask to find out about someone’s pain.





### **Culturally Sensitive Pain Assessment Tool** (Lasch 2000)

This is a model that has been developed to assess pain with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

What do you call your pain?

What name do you give it?

Why do you think you have this pain?

What does your pain mean for your body?

How severe is it?

Will it last a long or short time?

Do you have any fears about your pain?

If so, what do you fear most about your pain?

What are the chief problems that your pain causes for you?

What kind of treatment do you think you should receive?

What are the most important results you hope to receive from the treatment?

What cultural remedies have you tried to help you with your pain?

Have you seen a traditional healer for your pain? Do you want to?

Who, if anyone, in your family do you talk to about your pain? What do they know? What do you want them to know?

Do you have family and friends that help you because of your pain? Who helps you?



When working with people from cultures different to your own, you cannot assume they are using words to describe their pain, in the same way as you would use them. You cannot take what they are telling you at face value. You need to use extra and more specific questions to ensure that you get all the correct information you need. You need to think about their cultural norms of expressing and dealing with pain and filter the information that you are getting through this extra lens.

## Section 6 – Providing a Culturally Competent Service



Activity (slides 36, 37, 38, 39)

### Case Study 1

An immigrant mother brings her 2-year-old child to see the doctor. She tells the doctor that the child is in pain ( a severe headache) and suffering from fever. The doctor takes the child's temperature and finds that it is within the normal range. The doctor tells the mother that the child hasn't got a fever and to give the child pain killers that are prescribed for children of his age. The mother insists that the child has fever and that is why he has a headache and that he has had it for 3 days and needs medicine for the fever. She feels that the doctor is not taking her concerns for her child seriously and becomes upset with her treatment and the perceived lack of understanding of the fever her child is having.

### Case Study Questions

What are the issues that this case study brings up between a care giver and receiver?

How would you deal with this if you were the care giver?

What do you think the mother is really trying to explain about her child's illness?

What would you ask first?

What would you ask next?



### Case study 1

What would you check with the mother?  
What are you actually trying to find out?

### Case Study 2

Alisa is a health care provider working with Yen, a Chinese woman, who has recently been diagnosed with cancer. Yen speaks little English, and her husband translates for her. When her husband is present, Yen denies she is in pain. When he leaves the room, she admits to having pain. Yen’s husband indicates that he has very little faith in the medical community. He believes that pain medications interfere with the body’s “natural healing process”, he keeps her painkillers out of Yen’s reach. Instead, he provides his wife with curative herbal teas. (Anand et al.,2009)

### Case Study Questions

What do you think are the issues about dealing with pain that are being presented in this case study?  
If you were Alisia what questions do you think you should ask Yen?  
Do you think it would help if there was an interpreter present?  
What questions do you think you should ask Yen’s husband?



People from different cultures use different words to describe the same symptoms. Words in one language don’t always translate neatly into another language. The word fever can be used to describe unspecified illness rather than someone with a high temperature when translated from another language into English. Individuals describe pain and illness in different ways. Individuals from different cultures deal with pain in different ways. To understand you need to ask more questions, listen to what is being said and observe how it is being said. As a caregiver it is your responsibility to ensure you have completely understood the situation and any cultural misunderstandings are discussed and resolved.



For healthcare providers, cultural awareness involves four components.

1. The ability to identify the key cultural values of the patient.
2. An understanding of how cultural values influence a patient and his/her environment.
3. The skills to apply and implement services that are congruent with the patient's value system.
4. The acknowledgement that awareness is a continual journey to learn about different cultural values and how to understand the experiences of others.



Finish the session off by asking each learner to reflect on their learning by identifying 3 things they have learnt from the module and 3 actions they are going to take as a result of the learning. These can be things like finding out more or changes to their behaviour.



Identify 3 things you have learnt from this module.

Write down 3 actions you will take/ behaviours you will change, as a result of your learning.