



Cultural Considerations in Working with Men who use Violence in Relationships

Services for men from diverse cultures need careful consideration and an understanding of each man's unique experience. While violence against women is not accepted as the norm in any culture or society, there are certain values and beliefs embedded within all cultures that allow people to turn a blind eye to a man's use of violence against his intimate partner. In some cultures men are expected to protect their sisters, daughters and mothers, while at the same time men may use violence against their intimate partners.

The cultural identity of an individual is never stagnant; it is always changing and shifting. We can not assume that men from the same culture would have the same experiences, thinking, values or behaviors. Working with men from diverse cultures requires an in-depth collaborative journey in constructing the client's present identity with his cultural roots while helping him become aware of the cultural and spiritual values that he uses to justify violence against his intimate partner.

What can lead to an ineffective response by the counsellor with a man from another culture?

While counsellors often work hard to provide culturally sensitive services to men from diverse cultures, a lack of awareness of the impact of their interaction with men may cause them to be ineffective. The following examples highlight how the 'good' intent on the part of the counsellor may create feelings of disempowerment on the part of the client:

- *Counsellor tries to understand the man's experience by using previous experiences she/he has had with members from that cultural group.*
Man feels prejudged and thinks that he will not be believed or understood.
- *Counsellor confronts the man with a statement like "In Canada it is against the law to abuse your wife and we don't tolerate this behavior here."*
Man feels rejected by Canadian society and thinks that he is labeled as the criminal, terrorist or gang member. He also feels that Canadians think they are better than "his people".
- *Counsellor raises his/her voice and slows down her/his speech to make sure that the man understands since there is a language barrier.*
Man feels he is being treated like a child and that maybe the counsellor is yelling at him
- *Counsellor uses interpreter to communicate with the man and the counsellor doesn't make eye contact with the man.*
Man feels the counsellor doesn't care about him and he only answers what he is asked

The counsellor needs to feel confident that she/he can develop a strong client/counsellor relationship across any cultural boundaries. **The counsellor does not need to be an expert in cultural norms, she/he just needs to be interested in learning from the man's experience.**

Characteristics of culturally responsive Counsellor

(Adapted from: Violence Against women and cultural diversity training by Shelley Rivkin at the JI)

Becoming culturally responsive is a process that requires ongoing person growth. A culturally responsive counsellor needs to become aware of:

- Socio-political forces that impacted men's lives from diverse cultures
- Culture, class and language factors that may create barriers
- Immigrant experiences may lead to mistrust in the Justice System
- Differences in cultural and communication styles
- Counsellors' own attitudes, assumptions and biases that may influence the work

To become culturally responsive, the Counsellor must:

- Become culturally aware and sensitive to her/his own cultural heritage
- Recognize the importance of valuing and exploring differences
- Shift from believing that their own values and beliefs are superior, to accepting and respecting values and beliefs of other cultures
- Be aware of their own values and biases
- Be comfortable with differences of other's ethnicity, race, religion, ability and sexual orientation
- Be aware of institutional barriers
- Be able to generate a wide range of verbal and non-verbal responses