Cultural Competency: A Cardinal Force in Social Work Practice and Service

A Cultural Practice Guide for Human Services and the Helping Professions

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Abstract

Culture is a significant factor in human development, sustainability, and societal cohesion. It is greatly cherished and holds universal significance to individuals, groups, families, communities, societies, and nations. Culture affects how a victim, survivor, client, or family responds to life altering experiences such as domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, sexual abuse, and trauma. It also influences how a client or family deals with loss and grief, resilience, and recovery. Hence, understanding different cultures and cultural practices, symbols, artifacts, the meaning they hold, and respecting and operating within the confines of a set culture is very important. Cultural competency is a key medium through which this need can be addressed. Cultural competency is a core principle that should undergird a social worker's service/practice with clients as enshrined in the Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers. Failure to execute cultural competency is detrimental to the delivery of appropriate and effective services to clients, and a digression from the code of ethics and professional standard of practice within the profession of social work. The execution of cultural competency in social work practice fosters a positive and enduring therapeutic relationship between the social worker and client, and lays the foundation for productive engagement, interaction, and intervention. From this perspective, this article embodies a review of the research literature on the topic of culture and culturally competent

practice from different disciplines. The review and analysis include a study this author conducted in Ghana-Africa that examined the significance of culture and its impact on individuals and their perceptions as well as behaviors within a cultural context. Specifically, the study focused on the cultural effects on learning and the transfer of knowledge, and this paper relates its significant implications for understanding culture and responsiveness to cultural practices within professional practice. The findings from this original study revealed that culture impacts an individual's perception and behavior significantly. The implications for culturally effective social work practice were discussed and recommendations for cultural competence, responsive, and responsible practices including anti-oppressive intervention strategies at the micro, mezzo and macro levels were put forward. In addition, a cultural conceptual practice model called GACIE was proposed for use in assessing and intervening with culturally diverse ethnic minority clients.

1. Introduction

Culture plays a significant role in human development, sustainability, and societal cohesion. It is greatly revered as it holds universal significance to individuals, groups, families, communities, societies, and nations. As a result, understanding different cultures and cultural practices, symbols, artifacts, and the meaning they hold, and respecting and operating within the confines of a set culture is very important. Cultural competency is a key medium through which this need can be addressed. The NASW code of ethics iterates that cultural competency should form a core principle that should undergird a social worker's professional practice with clients. Failure to apply cultural competency in our practice is detrimental to the delivery of appropriate and effective service to clients and a digression from the code of ethics and professional standard of practice within the profession of social work. The application of cultural competency in social work practice establishes and promotes a positive and enduring therapeutic relationship between the social worker and the client. Additionally, it lays the foundation for productive engagement, interaction, and intervention. As Azzopardi & McNeill (2016) noted, despite substantial theoretical advances and numerous cultural competency educational resources available for professionals, there is limited research examining the translation of cultural competence principles and methods into better results for diverse clients. Continued social work research endeavors are therefore needed to support the requisite evidence-based knowledge to facilitate the refinement of our collective effectiveness as a discipline to practice across differences. From a critical culture perspective, this article embodies a review of the research literature on the topic of culture and culturally competent practice from different disciplines. The review and analysis include a study conducted in Ghana-Africa that explored the significance of culture and its impact on individuals and their perceptions and behaviors within a cultural context. Specifically, the study explored the cultural effects on learning and the transfer of knowledge. This paper draws a connection to its significance and implications for understanding culture and responsiveness to cultural differences and dynamics, and best approaches within professional practice/helping profession such as social work. The findings from this original study

revealed that culture impacts an individual's perception and behavior significantly. The implications for effective social work practice were discussed and recommendations for culturally competent, responsive, and responsible practices at the micro, mezzo and macro levels were presented.

1.1. The Importance of the Study

The objective of this research paper is to inform and reinforce to social workers, counselors, therapists, and other clinicians and practitioners, as well as administrators working in the human services or helping professions about the significance of culture, the need to understand culture, and cultural values and traditions through the lived experiences of clients/patients, as well as the cardinal need to develop and apply culture competence skills when interacting with and providing intervention services to or practicing with diverse clients. This literature offers significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge on culture and culturally competent practices with specific real-life examples based on research data. As Azzopardi & McNeill (2016) posited, although there are extensive theoretical advances and numerous cultural competency educational resources available for professionals, there is still limited research in the exploration of how to translate cultural competence principles and approaches into attainment of better outcomes for diverse clients. This research paper provides practitioners with important theoretical and practical information and guide to assist them in understanding and translating culture and cultural competence principles into better outcomes for clients from culturally diverse backgrounds. This resource will also help to facilitate best practices in adherence to the social work principle which delineates that research informs practice.

2. Literature Review

Culture has been defined in different ways by different authors and fields of study. Anthropologists define culture as all the knowledge, ideas, and objects, that are conveyed in a society from generation to generation. Social scientists define culture as all the norms, values, patterns of behavior, and artifacts that are transferred from one generation to the next and establishes a way of life of people (Appleby, Colon, & Hamilton, 2011). Kroeber & Kluckholm (1963) defined culture as "made up of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups" (p. 357). Hofstede (1980) came up with one of the most recognized and usually cited definitions of culture. He defined culture as patterned ways of thinking, feeling, and reacting, obtained and conveyed mainly by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their expressions in artifacts. At its foundation includes systems of values. *I define culture as the way of life of people in a particular context of a society that is expressed through behaviors, beliefs, worldviews, perspectives, activities, artifacts, symbols, and systems. It forms an essential part of their modus operandi.* Culture and society are interconnected and interdependent. Culture holds society together. The artifacts of culture are operationalized or actualized by society. Culture exists because we are able to share their constructions, meanings, implications, and importance and transfer knowledge from one generation to the other (Appleby, Colon, & Hamilton, 2011). Social

workers endeavor to understand a client in the contextual framework of person-in-environment. From this conceptual framework, it elucidates the interdependency between the individual and the environment such as the environment's effect on the client and the client's ability to shape the environment. Individuals attempt to strike a balance between their psychological capabilities or capacities and the demands of their environment (Appleby, Colon, & Hamilton, 2011). There is a critical need for practitioners to understand that populations whose cultures are subordinate to the dominant culture have been relegated by the dominant culture, and are susceptible or vulnerable to subjugation, discrimination, ethnocentricism and other forms of oppression (Appleby, Colon, & Hamilton, 2011). It is imperative to comprehend that culture is the conceptual foundation for comprehending social behavior. It is also essential to know that human culture is preserved and conveyed primarily through language. The linguistic relativity hypothesis suggests that each language shapes its speaker's view of the world in unique ways that is a mirroring of specific parts of its culture (Appleby, Colon, & Hamilton, 2011).

3. Understanding the Diversity of Cultures and Implications

Culture is considerably diverse. Even though cultures can be alike in general ways, however no two societies have the same values and norms. Members of every society have a propensity to use their cultural norms as the modus operandi and for evaluating other cultures. From this standpoint, they hold a perception in which their own group is the focal point of everything, and all others are assessed with reference to it. For example, generally, it is a common practice in African society to take care of the elderly including parents or family members at home until they pass away (Appleby, Colon, & Hamilton, 2011). Therefore, the practice in the United States of America whereby the elderlies are committed to nursing homes seem cruel, inhumane, and culturally and societally abhorrent. However, to the contrary, Americans see that as a normal cultural and societal practice. Every individual to some extent has a group-centered view or is ethnocentric as termed by anthropologist, though few of us generally admit it. It is necessary to acknowledge and comprehend this concept of fact, because it is the foundation for creating group differences, which then facilitates the process of marginalization and discrimination (Appleby, Colon, & Hamilton, 2011).

4. Cultural Norms and Values

All cultures share certain characteristics. Two common characteristics of every society's nonmaterial culture are its norms and values. Norms are mutual expectations and rules that guide human behavior, spoken or unspoken. As humans, most of our actions or inactions are influenced by norms. Values are abstract and general ideas about the qualities that members of a society regard as good, right, and desirable. They are the principal force that characterizes a society, and all norms derive in some value (Appleby, Colon, & Hamilton, 2011).

5. Dimensions of Cultures

Hofstede's (1980) developed four aspects of national culture orientation which are Power distance, masculine verse feminine, individualism verse collectivism, and uncertainty

avoidance. Power distance comprises the degree to which people view it natural that power, status, and privileges are shared unequally among individuals or that this distribution is inconsequential in their lives. In low power distance countries (e.g. United States) subordinates and superiors consider each other as equal in existence, and decentralization is popular, while high power distance countries adhere to authority of those in leadership positions and centralization of power and authority; and show a deep sense of connections to others and group belonging (Biró et al., 2002). The individual and the group have a mutual responsibility of looking out for and protecting each other in exchange for loyalty. Masculinity verses femininity is better viewed as hostility and quantity orientation verse concession/harmony and quality orientation. Masculine cultures lay emphasis on competition, assertiveness, and materialistic drives in terms of earnings and advancements, promotions, and big bonuses. On the contrary, a feminine culture is characterized by the concern for people, the quality of life, nurturing, and social well-being (Biró et al., 2002). Individualism verses collectivism is defined in regard to people's reverence of individual activities, enterprises, achievements, and successes verses the importance of their belonging to a social group. In an individualist culture, people take care only of themselves and their immediate families, and remain emotionally detached from or independent from the social group (Biró et al., 2002). Most North American countries including the U.S. exemplify this individualistic culture (Zoogah, 2001). Uncertainty avoidance is explicated in terms of how people approach ambiguous or uncertain situations. Innovation is usually characterized by a great level of ambiguity. Consequently, it is easier in weak uncertainty avoiding cultures (e.g. U.S.) while in a strong uncertainty avoiding culture (e.g. Ghana), there is high anxiety in people who usually like to work hard and prefer instituting and following rules. The real execution of the outcomes of innovation requires this orientation (Biró et al., 2002). Hofstede (1980) later added a fifth element to the original four dimensions of national culture which he named as long-term verse short-term value orientation (Hofstede, 1991, 2001). This refers to "the choice of focus for people's efforts: the future or the present" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 29).

6. Social Workers Knowledge and Understanding of Cultural Factors and Dynamics is Key

As a social worker, it is important to know that people from a different culture or those who are new (e.g. immigrants including refugees and asylees) to a new society such as the United States, and beginning to adapt to the dominant U.S. culture complain about the difficulty, confounding, and stress associated with not understanding the rules, or not being able to do what they would have easily done at the home country or country of origin, which would have been recognized as appropriate. A good example is eye contact. While many cultures including some Asian and African cultures, expect that when an individual is communicating with a person with greater status or authority, they avoid direct eye contact, in the United States, this is considered or viewed as inattention or lack of interest in the social interaction. The response of the dominant culture is to apply a negative sanction, a branding, which the individual will experience without ever knowing the alleged violation or incongruous behavior (Appleby, Colon, & Hamilton, 2011). Societies such as the United States of America are made up of many different groups; not everybody in a society shares every component of

the dominant culture. Some groups may have different lifestyles, values, or norms that are different from those of the dominant culture (Appleby, Colon, & Hamilton, 2011). It is necessary that social workers or practitioners identify client-held cultural factors that serve as a resource for dealing with the client's problems as well as cultural factors in the environment that serve as a resource for dealing with the client's problems. Conversely, it is important for the social worker to identify the cultural characteristics that contribute to or exacerbate client's problems (Kilpartrick & Holland, 2009). Cultural competency is as important as information literacy. Most especially having principal knowledge about cultural issues as it relates to different ethnicities such as immigrants and their interactions with the local immigration system and policies is essential. Clients' distinctive lived experiences and cultural values and traditions are important, and people may behave or act in a certain way to incidents based on these values. Social workers must ensure that they do not overlook specific dimensions of different cultures when engaged in practice with clients.

7. Language Barrier and Other Cultural Variables and Dynamics

Language barrier is one of the common issues that immigrants from non-English speaking countries experience in the United States. Language barrier prevents families from receiving the appropriate services within the 22-month time frame a family must complete requirements needed for them to get permanent custody of a child. Because this policy does not tackle the need for the presence of paperwork and other kinds of communication to be translated into the families' indigenous language, it greatly affects the child's chance of not being able to be reunified with their family, which is usually the only people these children have been exposed to (Velazquez & Dettlaff, 2011). The number of immigrants and refugees in the United States of America is increasing fast. The foreign-born percentage of the total U.S. population has nearly tripled in the past fifty years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Thus, it is essential that social workers and those in the helping professions be equipped and prepared to work effectively with this population. Social work practice with refugees and immigrants requires special and distinct knowledge of the unique issues of these populations. It also requires special adaptations and tailored applications of mainstream services, interventions, and programs. Many Social Workers practice in settings that serve immigrant and refugee clients, and most social workers can expect to encounter clients like these during their social work career (Potocky-Tripodi, 2002, p. 3). The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) acknowledges that immigrants and refugees face exceptional difficulties as a result of immigration policies. The legal statuses as well as social statuses of immigrants affect the provision of social services. This relationship between legislation and social service provision was raised in NASW's 2015 policy statement, that "social workers' capacity to assist clients is constrained by immigration policies… (p.178). The code offers a set of values, principles, and standards to guide decision-making and conduct and practice within the profession. The NASW's commitment to diversity is seen in the core value "Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of a person." *Social workers are to treat each person in a caring and respectful fashion, mindful of differences and cultural and ethnic diversity.* Social workers assess their client's situation and then create opportunities for improvement and provide intervention to assist the clients cope with their real-life experiences and change it

positively, if determined as necessary to do so. Part of their assessment involves critically exploring and identifying factors in their social environment that either impede their progress or drive their challenges and capacities/strengths that foster their positive progress and resilience. A possession of cultural competency is one of the important tools that social workers can utilize efficiently in this exploration endeavor in assessment that leads to developing an appropriate and adequate intervention. Diversity fosters the progression of society positively, including the capacity to facilitate creativity and innovation from different minds, ethnicities, races, and backgrounds. The presence and experiences in the differences in cultures present an opportunity for enlightenment through exposure, interaction, exchange of material and nonmaterial objects and varying degrees of social discourses. It is necessary to incorporate cultural awareness practices into delivery services…and in everyday practice (Fong, *et al.* 2016). There is a need to have Cultural awareness because patterns of behavior viewed as problematic in our own culture could be normal in other cultures (Goldiamond 2002; Vandenberghe 2008). For example, an African may display their cultural identity through their belief system, foods consumed, clothing, or hair style. Even though this person may identify as African, there are subcultures to which this individual may further identify with (Fong, *et al.* 2016). The American Psychological Association's (APA) (2003) acknowledged the significance of multiculturalism and cultural awareness in practice. In the organization's multicultural guidelines, it encouraged clinicians to "recognize that, as cultural beings, they may hold attitudes and beliefs that can detrimentally influence their perceptions of and interactions with individuals who are ethnically and racially different from themselves" (p. 382). As practitioners, acquiring cultural self-awareness is important because it may preclude our biases from hindering how we serve culturally diverse clients (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998; Fong *et al.* 2016). Developing and enhancing cultural awareness (Desai, Dodor, & Carroll, 2020) is relevant. One strategy to facilitate cultural self-awareness is having a group discussion about our diverse client interactions with a professional community, during mentorship meetings, in written forums and journals, and in verbal feedback sessions, or in self-reflective exercises (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Clinicians can engage in more cultural awareness practices by conducting assessment, gathering data, and testing hypotheses rather than just accepting their personal experiences and biases as the standard (Sue, 1998). Scientific mindedness is an essential attribute of human service providers and clinicians who produce theories about behaviors of clients through data analysis rather than by reliance on their own assumptions (Sue, 1998). This practice may decrease bias and facilitate better understanding of client behavior. As Fong, *et al.* (2016) correctly noted, our population diversity is growing, consequently, it is also increasing the complexity and variations we can expect to encounter, therefore we must continue to develop cultural competence skills through cultural awareness, acquiring the correct data, and respecting and fulfilling what is important to our clients. Cultural characteristics are essential even when executing practices backed by research and centered on the science of behavior analysis (Sugai et al., 2012). Cultural empathy requires that a clinician understands and be responsive to the lived experiences of various clients centered on their analysis of cultural data, as well as emotional and communicative processes (Ridley & Lingle, 1996). Critical approaches to practice assist in exposing sociocultural and political

structures and processes that reinforce deeply rooted power imbalances that impact the lived experiences, social omissions, and material penury of marginalized groups. Together, these complementary methods are parts of a conceptual framework that acknowledges individual qualities as well as environmental forces that are the cause of many adversities impacting diverse individuals and communities (Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016). The essentiality of empathy and compassion in culturally competent social work services was reiterated by members of a variety of oppressed groups (Gentlewarrior, Martin-Jearld, Skok, & Sweetser, 2008). We can develop an awareness of diversity and the willingness to actualize what is right for our clients (Fong, *et al.* 2016). The awareness of cultural differences and similarities may give us the opportunity to make modifications to programs that culminates in more culturally suitable models of behavior analytic service delivery (Fong, *et al.* 2016). The importance of cultural competence has been widely covered by many scholars, practitioners, and organizations. Due to its significance, it has been embodied into standards of professional practice in many disciplines or fields of practice. In the profession of social work, it is embedded in the NASW code of ethics. Culturally competent social work (NASW, 2001; NASW, 2015) is the process in which social workers engage with diverse clients ethically by completing assessments and offering interventions that are suitable or tailored to the culture, context, class, and identity of the client (Fong & Furato, 2001; Lusk, Chavez, Palomo, & Palacios, 2014). Social work practitioners have for many years accentuated the key role of cultural competence and ethnic sensitivity in effective practice. As the profession becomes more diverse, culturally competent practice is viewed as an essential requirement to attain effective practice (Lusk, Terrazas, & Salcido, 2017). It is critical to note that "Cultural competence is more than cultural awareness—it is the set of behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together to enable a system, agency, or professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations" (Bainbridge, McCalman, Clifford, & Tsey, 2015, p. 2). Increasing cultural awareness may also reduce cultural conflicts, erroneous assessments, or misdiagnoses, as well as curtail or prevent the likelihood of social workers/practitioners expecting the clients they serve to behave in a way that conforms or aligns with their personal cultural values and norms. As Henriksen & Watts (1999) suggested, it is necessary that practitioners develop self-awareness of their personal culturally-based assumptions, prejudices, and biases that may be impediments to their work with culturally diverse clients. Consequently, these authors' development of an instrument that measures these variables is beneficial to the field of human services. In recognition of the significance of multiculturalism and cultural sensitivity in practice with clients including during psychotherapy, Wilcox, Gale, McLaughlin, Squyres, Burish & Khojasteh (2022) stated that there is a great need to identify training and education elements that facilitate the development of multicultural competence and multicultural orientation (with respect to education and training) and developed a notable new instrument. This represents advancement in multicultural training measurement that may assist in the elucidation of training mechanisms that foster the multicultural competence and multicultural orientation of therapists. Azzopardi & McNeill (2016) contended that one can never unequivocally develop competence simply through the attainment of cultural knowledge and skills. Continuously maintaining a mindful awareness of culture and diversity, including the complicated means

by which we make meaning and experience, enhances effective and ethical practice. These authors perceive cultural consciousness as a continuing and dynamic developmental process without a terminus. It requires the social worker to be thoughtful, critical, active, and purposeful in their engagement with the client when entering the helping relationship. To add my voice to Azzopardi & McNeill (2016) assertions, it is my belief that culture is a powerful, [deeply rooted, enduring, and dynamic] concept that shapes people and communities across the world. Among other factors, it can affect how they think, act, store information, as well as retrieve, process and apply information (Attipoe, 2016).

8. Methods

This research project involved a thorough literature review and secondary data analysis involving the author reviewing relevant research literature exploring the meaning and significance of culture and cultural competence in the field of social work and related human services disciplines. These included theoretical and conceptual arguments and iterations, practice methods, and practice recommendations. I used search engines and academic databases such as Academic Search, Crossref, Social Science Network, PsycINFO, Anthropological Index Online, and Google Scholar. The volume of literature obtained from the search was rigorously reviewed through multiple filtration processes, and the most relevant literatures pertaining to the specific objective of this research paper were selected, and a final review was completed. This was followed by the ultimate compilation and composition of the most essential information culminating into this research paper. With regards to the research conducted in Ghana (used as a point of reference due to its relevance to the significance of culture and its effect on individuals), the sample size was 17. These participants were made up of 11 males and 6 females. This was a qualitative research design involving in-person semi-structured interviews conducted in Ghana. The data collected was transcribed and analyzed using thematic data coding and analysis. Refer to Appendix A for excerpts of the key data collected in relation to the significance of culture.

9. Conclusions Drawn from the Findings of the Study

The major conclusion that emerged from these findings was that: power distance permeates organizational life whether through hierarchy or asymmetrical power relationships or family and age differences. It also supports the existence of two of Hofstede's (1991, 2001) five dimensions of national culture, namely power distance and collectivism. Not only are these cultural factors obvious in the Ghanaian society in general, but these are also manifested in organizations in Ghana. The findings from this study showed that there may be some indication that the Ghanaian culture may reflect a long-term value orientation. For example, participant Yaw indicated that the Ghanaian culture supports sustainability and that people leave things for their family members for the future. He described this as follows: "The Ghanaian believe in sustainability. They leave things for family members and the community…" The findings from this study also reveals that African countries like Ghana do not orient to the western stern treatment of time. In Ghana, time commitments and plans are prone to changes so easily because people view plans and time commitments in amenable terms. The common tendency in the Ghanaian culture is to treat time with flexibility, whereby

the focus is on interpersonal relationship as opposed to the task-oriented view of time as prevalent in organizations and societies in western countries. Western countries like the US orient to a sequential time culture (Trompanaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997) (time is viewed as a monetary commodity/ transactional commodification of time, task-oriented, and interpersonal relationship is secondary).
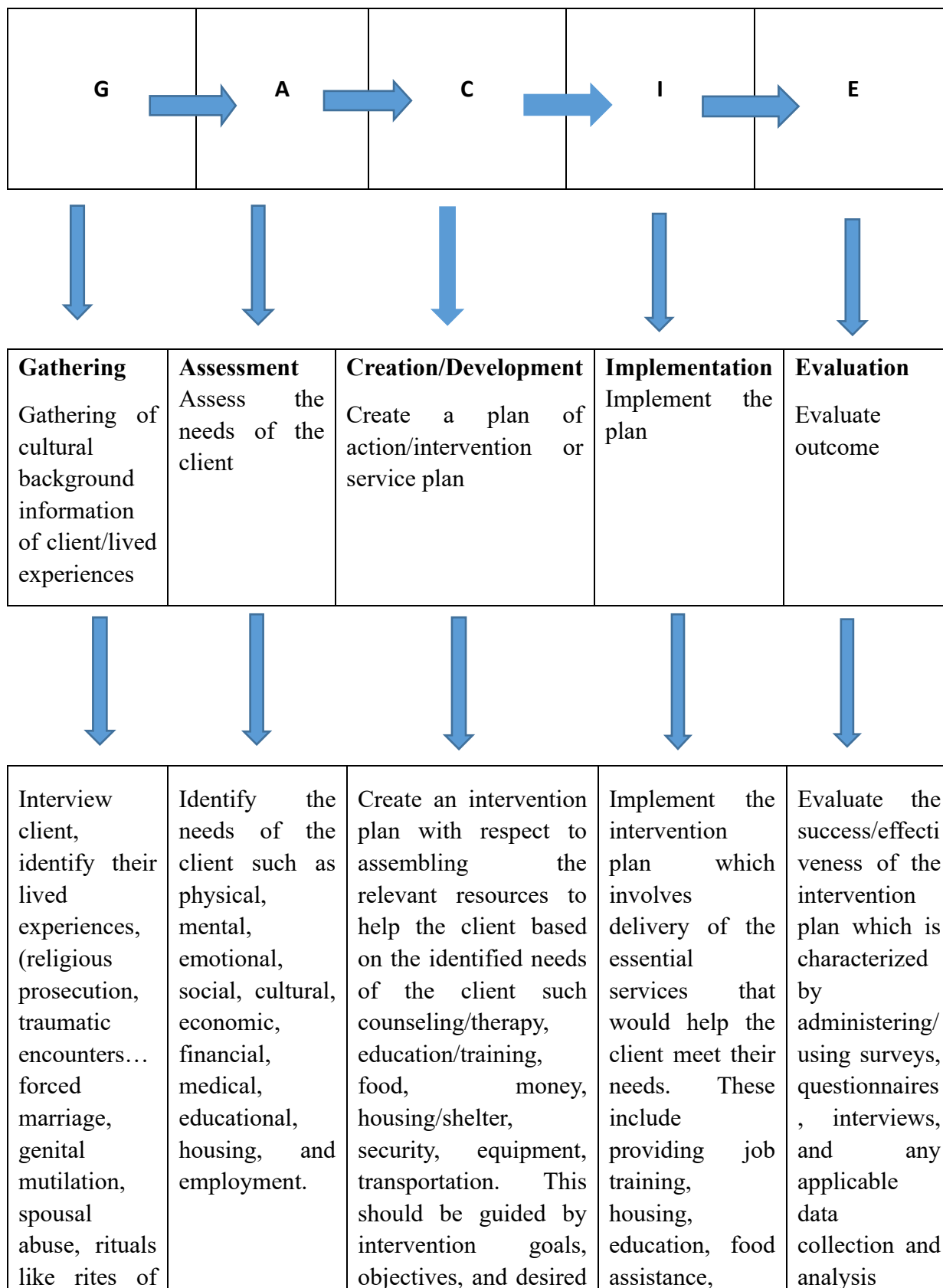
10. Discussion: Implication for Practice

Culture is an integral part of society and influences and shapes human behavior. Culture influences people's behavior physically, psychologically, emotionally, mentally, and cognitively. Culture affects an individual's world view, frame of mind and frame of reference. By the same token, culture shapes the behavior of clients, social workers, and clinicians engaged with clients whether in therapy, case management, service provision, and community engagements at the micro or macro levels of practice. Therefore, it is imperative that social workers develop the cultural competence knowledge, skills, and abilities to better assess and assist clients from diverse cultures or clients from cultures different from their own. As the literature shows, misconceptions, biases, misdiagnosis, missteps, misinformation, stereotypes, and misunderstandings are due to the lack of cultural knowledge/awareness and understanding. Attipoe (2022) correctly posited, cultural awareness would help prevent mistreatments of clients and facilitate provision of more effective services while establishing better relationships between the client and their therapist or social worker. Developing, practicing, and sustaining cultural competence requires concerted focus on multiple areas of practice and service. These include the acquisition of relevant cultural knowledge, awareness, sensitivity, skills, attitudes, behavior at all levels of practice, service, policy, programs, and organizational culture and values. Cultural competence and cultural sensitivity practice is evidently important to the profession of social work and other professions, especially those that involve direct practice with diverse client populations. For example, a family from a society or country whose social and cultural orientation is collectivism who has relocated to the United States (an individualistic culture society) as immigrants, may be referred for services due to cultural conflict. The children may have acculturated to the America culture through attending school and socializing with their American-born peers. They might have adopted the American culture of freedom, independence, free speech, assertiveness, and making direct eye-contact, etc., and demonstrate these behaviors at home which the parents might conceive as been disrespectful, insolent, disobedient, or spoiled, and therefore unacceptable. The parent may introduce corporal punishment which is considered discipline in their country of origin but prohibited in the United States of America. The child may call Child Protective Services on the parent to report the parent's disciplinary action which the child might have learned or taught at school. The Child Protective Services may get involved and the parent could be charged with child abuse. This would create great tension at the home between the child and the parent because Child Protect Services is now involved, and a case is opened on the family. In most collective societies, children are not oriented to call Child Protective Services or law enforcement/police on their parents for conducting disciplinary action such as corporal punishment. Corporal punishment is ingrained in those societies as part of raising and molding the child properly. It is viewed as part of the developmental

process of molding the child to become a responsible and well-behaved adult and productive member of the society. Those who are Christians generally orient to the Biblical statement, "If you spare the rod, you spoil the child." Furthermore, involvement in the Child Protective Services or law enforcement may be viewed as a shame and dishonor to the family. Collectivism is a central part of African and Asian cultures while individualism is the primary cultural orientation in Western countries. For example, Africans have a proverb that is recognized universally as "It takes a village to raise a child." Another key cultural value illustrating the principle of collectivism is "Ubuntu" which is a concept that holds that your sense of being, or personhood is impacted by your relationships with other people. In the sense that it reflects how our actions or behaviors have effects on others and on our society collectively. Another meaning holds that "I am because you/we are" …meaning your wellbeing is connected to my wellbeing and the wellbeing of society (humanity) in general. As a social worker or therapist, we must be aware of and sensitive to these complex cultural factors such as the client's values, traditions, norms, folklores, artifacts, concepts, and related dynamics. We must understand the client's cultural frame of reference. These include material and non-materials cultures. We must ensure that we are engaged with the culturally diverse family in a culturally sensitive and appropriate manner and provide intervention services that are culturally appropriate to prevent marginalization, oppression, and avoid further traumatizing the family/client and destabilizing their productive functioning and equilibrium. From a strengths and empowerment base as well as culturally sensitive and responsive framework, the social worker/therapist should empower clients to leverage their cultural capital based on the notion and recognition that they are the "experts" of their culture and lived experiences. This approach is consequential to and manifestation of our social work ethos of "meeting the client where they are" and helping the client succeed through "self-determination."

To better serve ethnic and cultural minority clients, especially from foreign countries like Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, I propose the utilization of a model called GACIE which is an acronym that stands for Gathering, Assessing, Creating/Developing, Implementing, and Evaluating. Specifically, GACIE is a cultural conceptual model/framework for the Collection of cultural data, Assessment of needs, Development of intervention plan, Implementation of intervention plan and services, and Evaluation of services to ethnic/cultural minority clients. This model was informed and inspired by the ADDIE model which is an instructional design model for developing and designing a training and education program. The acronym ADDIE stands for Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate (Branch, 2009).

Table 1. Gathering, Assessing, Creating/Developing, Implementing, and Evaluating: GACIE Model

G	A	C	I	E

Gathering	**Assessment**	**Creation/Development**	**Implementation**	**Evaluation**
Gathering of cultural background information of client/lived experiences	Assess the needs of the client	Create a plan of action/intervention or service plan	Implement the plan	Evaluate outcome

Interview client, identify their lived experiences, (religious prosecution, traumatic encounters… forced marriage, genital mutilation, spousal abuse, rituals like rites of	Identify the needs of the client such as physical, mental, emotional, social, cultural, economic, financial, medical, educational, housing, and employment.	Create an intervention plan with respect to assembling the relevant resources to help the client based on the identified needs of the client such counseling/therapy, education/training, food, money, housing/shelter, security, equipment, transportation. This should be guided by intervention goals, objectives, and desired	Implement the intervention plan which involves delivery of the essential services that would help the client meet their needs. These include providing job training, housing, education, food assistance,	Evaluate the success/effectiveness of the intervention plan which is characterized by administering/using surveys, questionnaires, interviews, and any applicable data collection and analysis

passage), research ethnic background, identify significant cultural and religious factors and artifacts/tangible and intangible/material and nonmaterial cultural factors.		outcomes and time-frame, identify action steps, responsibilities and parties responsible for completing tasks.	medical and mental health services.	instruments to measure the effectiveness of outcomes of services delivered to clients.

11. Conclusion

This paper highlighted the importance of culture and culture diversity in our society, it's significance to individuals from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and reveals that cultural awareness is vital to practice as it empowers social workers, counselors, therapists, and other professionals in the helping field to value the diversity in others, and by doing so, create and promote a healthy and productive relationship between the worker and the client without prejudice. Human service workers such as social workers are essential workers whose services to individuals, families, groups, communities, and societies are pivotal. They serve a diverse client population with unique backgrounds, ethnicities, cultures, traditions, values, norms, and life experiences. To better serve these diverse clients, social workers must possess an understanding, knowledge, and recognition of their unique cultures. This capacity can be obtained through cultural awareness and/or consciousness--serving as bridge through which a purposeful endeavor on the part of the social worker or practitioner to develop a respectable level of culture competence or culturally competent practice with diverse clients is pursued. Culturally competent practice is evidently essential to effective service and practice with diverse clients as has been elucidated resoundingly by numerous authors presented in this paper. Culturally competent practice will avert or reduce cultural misunderstandings, conflicts, and misdiagnosis. It will inhibit unconscious bias, counteract implicit and explicit discrimination due to ignorance, misinformation, stereotype, and ethnocentrism. It is essential to develop and implement culturally sensitive, responsive, and responsible social work practice with clients, regardless of their race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, or religion. A social worker who demonstrates cultural sensitivity with diverse clients will foster the building of productive and trustworthy therapeutic relationships and service outcomes. Finally, the application of culture competence in practice fulfills a key value

highlighted in the code of ethics of the National Association of Social Workers while also facilitating the needs of a group that needs it the most.

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Appendix A: Excerpts from interview response data/transcript

Key Themes

In this section, I present some relevant excerpts from some of the key findings from the study I conducted in Ghana which examined the impact of culture on individual's (trainee's) behavior. These excerpts were selected from the data because they shed specific and relevant light on the significance of culture and its effects on participants' behavior, perceptions, capacities, and limitations. Some of the relevant and key themes I identified from the study are as follows:

• Sometimes it is the culture that would prevent you
• As a society, the way we have been brought up, you know that your bosses are never wrong
• In Ghana we respect the elderly and we tend to take the decisions of the elderly
• We work like a family and form closer bonds
• To change the status quo doesn't go down well with people
• It takes a long time to change the mindsets and attitudes of people
• Africans we mystify what we don't know
• Me ba ha che syndrome: someone has stayed in there for 30 years, he doesn't want to move…
• There is no systematic way of doing things…We don't do things timorously
• The fact that we have mixed races or mixed culture at the office somehow has diluted the effect of the Ghanaian nest or the fact that we locally would be resisting change.

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