Multicultural Mental Health Awareness Scale

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Australia is one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) society in the world. There are individuals from all over the globe settled in Australia. They enter Australia as migrants or refugees. Although, the process of migration differs from individual to individual, it can be an uprooting experience and can bring with it many mental health challenges which need professional attention. Mainstream allied and mental health professionals need to be prepared for this diverse population and their mental health issues and concerns. These professionals may have to offer multicultural counselling to clients from an ethnic and cultural background, which is very different from their own. It is therefore essential for them to demonstrate multicultural counselling competencies (MCC).

The concept of MCC first emerged in USA in the 1980's and comprises of dimensions such as: awareness, knowledge and skills. Awareness refers to the ability to be aware of one own biases, values and attitudes that can affect work with a CALD individual. Knowledge refers to an understanding of how "race and ethnicity" can impact the personality, behaviour, psychological disorders and help seeking behaviours of an individual. It also involves gathering information about a specific cultural group. Finally, skills refer to a professional ability to use awareness and knowledge to work in a culturally competent manner with a CALD client, taking into consideration his / her background, values, beliefs and life experiences. It refers to a range of skills used to communicate and intervene effectively with the CALD clients. A number of training programs have been focusing on the enhancement of the allied and mental health professional cultural competencies and multicultural counselling skills.

Keeping in view that the MCC are important for mental and allied health professional to work effectively with diverse individuals, there is a need to assess these qualities in Australian professional, especially when they have attended a specific training for this reason. Considering the scarcity of measures that can be used in the Australian context, researchers from QUT (Nigar Khawaja and Ivy Gomez) and QTMHC (Greg Turner) collaborated to develop a scale to address this gap in the literature. The authors generated items and asked Psychologists, Social workers and Counsellors, with extensive experience of working with ethnic clients, to shortlist and provide feedback on the items. The shortlisted items were tested out with 268 mental health professionals. Statistical analyses revealed a 35-item scale with three factors. The scale was labelled as "Multicultural Mental Health Awareness Scale (MMHAS)". The factors reflected the "awareness, knowledge and skills" features of multicultural competency. The first factor "Multicultural Counselling Awareness" reflects the professionals' awareness of how their cultural background may impact the service they provide to CALD clients. It also captures the impact the client as well as provider's culture may have on intervention. Moreover, the "Knowledge" factor measured the professional's familiarity with national multicultural policies and services relevant to CALD individuals. Finally, the "Skills" factor measure the professional ability to offer culturally sensitive and appropriate interventions. It is also evaluated the professionals ability to communicate and build rapport with the CALD client in a culturally appropriate manner. The scale has sound psychometric properties. It has been supported by research as a valid and reliable tool. It has emerged as a good tool to assess mental health professionals' MCC and improvement in the competencies as a result of the training programs. The scale is currently being used in clinical and research settings. For more information please email n.khawaja@qut.edu.au