

Developing an anthropological psychiatry strategy for culturally framed social defeat affecting Dalits in higher education in India

SUSHRUT JADHAV, DIVISION OF PSYCHIATRY

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Psychiatry and clinically applied anthropology have a vital role in helping *Dalit** students and faculty in India's higher education who experience social defeat and psychological distress associated with caste-ism. A brief pilot eclectic intervention deployed active listening ('witnessing'), reframing narratives of life-experience, critically examining interpretive metaphors, and unpacking cultural dynamics of everyday oppression.

This poster outlines preliminary findings from intensive weekly ethnographically oriented clinical therapy sessions with 11 students and staff in an Indian university over a period of 6 months with a follow up at 3 and 6 months.



INVERTING THE LANGUAGE OF OPPRESSION

Although diagnostic assessment found no formal psychiatric disorder meeting ICD-10 criteria at outset, subjects expressed substantial social and psychological distress. Preliminary findings demonstrate that *Dalit* students may be helped to overcome social defeat through a therapy designed to strengthen skills to cope with humiliating, oppressive and discriminatory experiences.



Unintended consequences – locating pathology in the victim

Over the course of cultural psychotherapy sessions, key reported themes of their experience that emerged were historical and contemporary experiences of persecution, humiliation, rejection, social psychological conflict, and resistance. Eclectic interventions included *narrative restructuring, bibliotherapy, metaphor shift, re-inventing personal myths, and re-scripting cultural identity*. Social recognition through *witnessing* provided relief and enhanced effective agency in institutional and family social relations. Improved academic confidence and performance, positive regard for personal identity, reduced suicidal ideation, better interpersonal skills and enhanced well-being were reported over the course of the intervention. Gains were sustained over 12 months. In stressful higher educational settings that have been associated with social suffering and suicide, these data indicate the significance of this approach. As a therapeutic strategy to mitigate the impact of adversity, it also requires social strategies that address caste-ism.



Deploying cartographic techniques, plotting cultural psychological journeys, and exploring personal identity

Interventions inspired by Fanon's *Oppressor*; Baro's *Liberation Psychology*; Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Goffman's *Disclosure*; Lacan's *Gaze Reversal*; & *Anti-oppressive therapies* for Race & Gender

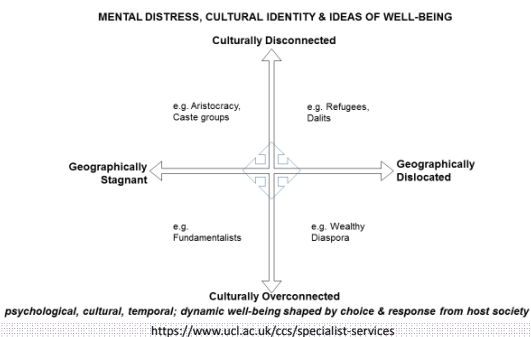


Further research to refine, trial, and replicate such clinical anthropological strategies based on this experience could benefit not only Dalit students but also other young adults with marginalised social identities across cultural contexts, who experience, internalise and have difficulty coping with culturally framed social defeat.

* A self defined term by former 'untouchable' castes in Hinduism, and classified as 'Depressed Classes' by British Raj Census in India. Dalit means 'broken' or 'shattered' or 'oppressed' in Sanskrit/Hindi. Dalit population in India is approx. 305 million (Census India 2011).

** Image, <http://weknowmemes.com/>

Theoretical schema



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