

**“Receptivity and Readiness for Cultural Competence Training
among the Human Service Professions in Hong Kong”**
Department of Applied Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Release of Research Findings

**PolyU research reveals inadequate cultural competence training for
human service professionals and
cultural competent practice in Hong Kong**

The Department of Applied Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) was funded by the Equal Opportunity Commission’s Funding Programme of Research Projects on Equal Opportunities 2017/18 to conduct a research study during December 2017 to December 2018. This study aimed to examine understandings of cultural competence among human service professionals (including nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, social workers, and school teachers) in Hong Kong and identify best practices for providing cultural competence training. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with 48 key informants from the five professions.

Generally speaking, human service professionals in Hong Kong are less exposed to culturally diverse service settings. In terms of training on cultural competence, there are few specialized courses, activities, or practical training opportunities on cultural competence for students. For current practitioners, there are limited on-the-job training opportunities focused on serving ethnoculturally diverse groups, especially for local nurses and therapists. In addition, few professional support resources are available for these practitioners to develop a deeper understanding of their clients’ heritage and perspectives, such as norms associated with diet, gender differences, and family dynamics.

Key findings

1. The qualitative interviews showed that compared to social workers, teachers and occupational therapists, nurses and physiotherapists are generally less concerned about being culturally sensitive, because they feel it is sufficient to fulfil their duties by following standardized procedures and protocols in hospitals, while social workers, teachers and occupational therapists often need to engage in more personal communication with service users, so they have higher cultural sensitivities.

2. The extent of the implementation of culturally competent practice varies across professions and service areas. In service domains requiring practitioners to interact more closely with patients and follow up individual cases, practitioners may be more aware of clients' cultural needs and be more proactive in supporting them with specific attitudes and approaches.
3. The majority of human service professionals, especially those who have more direct communications with service targets, often face language barriers and various forms of cultural shocks when encountering the needs and cultural norms of ethnoculturally diverse clients. In addition, few professional support resources are available for these practitioners to develop a deeper understanding of their clients' heritage and perspectives, such as norms associated with diet, gender differences, and family dynamics.
4. In terms of training on cultural competence, there are few specialized courses, activities, or practical training opportunities on cultural competence for students in local tertiary institutions. Also, there are limited on-the-job training opportunities focused on serving ethnoculturally diverse groups.
5. Professionals' willingness to receive training will be stronger if they encounter more non-Chinese clients in their service settings and if their daily tasks require closer working relationships with clients. Nurses and physiotherapists report a lower willingness to receive training compared to other professionals.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. For educational programmes for human service professions:
 - i) Educators should not only teach students content and principles, but also provide students with opportunities to interact with ethnoculturally diverse communities through multiple means, such as exchange programmes, service learning, site visits, and so on.
 - ii) Educators should also be equipped with sensitivity, awareness, knowledge, and perspectives to enable them to decide how their respective training curricula could be adapted or modified to integrate cultural competence concepts and components alongside key professional practice content, and to ensure that training is more relevant and in alignment with the practice realities of practitioners from different disciplines.

2. For on-the-job training for human service professions:
 - i) Employers should provide time release to encourage practitioners to attend training. Formal training programs and certificates could be used as incentive to motivate a higher level of participation, and continuous education units or continuous professional accreditation mechanisms could be established.

3. For institutional changes:
 - i) The services should be more user-friendly for the ethnoculturally diverse clients. A centralized pool of interpretative services should be established.

 - ii) A cultural sensitivity screening framework should be formulated as an evaluation tool to examine if the existing policies, programs and services provided by the government and any organizations may fulfill the needs of ethnoculturally diverse clients.

 - iii) Codes of professional practice and professional protocols for local practitioners should be amended to explicitly require practitioners to be culturally competent in practice.

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