



# DEALING WITH PAIN

## Module 8



Co-funded by the  
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# Learning Objectives

By the end of this module learners will be able to:

Understand	different aspects of pain.
Understand	the patient related factors that differentiate pain across different cultures.
Detect	pain experience, pain control and pain expression across cultures.
Apply	a Culturally Sensitive Pain Assessment Tool.
Reflect	on real life intercultural communication problems.

# Introduction

Hello, yesterday I had a conversation with a colleague about how the person they were caring for seemed to be in a lot of pain most of the days this week, and how she wanted to help him with it.

However, whenever she asked him what the pain felt like or how severe it was, he simply said, it was nothing, he had had worse pain, and he would probably be fine tomorrow.

My colleague was worried about him, but wasn't sure how much pain he was actually suffering, and how she could help him, when he seemed unwilling to talk about it.

I do know we all feel and describe pain in different ways. I am still wondering what I can say to my colleague to help her with this situation. What do you think?



# Exercise: How do you describe pain?

Write down 3 words / phrases that you would use to describe your pain to someone, in each situation below:

- Indigestion caused by eating rich food.
- Banging your elbow on a door frame.
- A headache which makes you need to lie down.
- Cutting your finger on a sharp knife.

# Describing pain



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- Describing pain is subjective and it can be difficult to find the right words.
- How we describe pain, the words and terminology we use is part of who we are.
- How we deal with pain, and the expectations of others of how we deal with it, is part of our upbringing and therefore part of our culture.

# Explaining Pain

- Pain is a universal feeling. It helps humans recognize threats or problems regarding their body.
- Although pain is a natural function all human beings feel, it is also a cultural experience.
- Culture influences the way people experience pain, the way they perceive and respond to pain, as well as how they communicate it to others. (*BODY Culture, Body, Gender, Sexuality in Adult Trainings, 2013*).



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# About Pain

- **Pain** is a biological, psychological and social phenomenon.
- **Pain control** influences the quality of life.
- **Pain experience** is how we perceive and manifest pain. It includes thoughts, feelings, reactions, expectations and past experiences associated with pain.
- **Pain expression** includes verbal and nonverbal behavior regarding pain. Varies in different cultures.



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# Pain and Culture

In some cultures, individuals tend to express their pain, to share it with others (Mediterranean, Middle East), while in others (Confucian cultures) they suppress it and keep it to themselves.

Tolerance to pain also changes as the time passes by and the cultures evolve.

**EXAMPLE:** *The English author Fanny Burney in 1808 offered to hold her own cancerous breast while the surgeon removed it without anesthetic, because these were the cultural expectations at that time.*

**Today, we try to find a way to remove pain.**



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# Exercise: Your Experiences of Pain

Think back to when you were a child.

What were the expectations of how you dealt with any pain you had, by the adults caring for you?

*Mark the statement that applies to you the most.*

- a. I had to tolerate it and not make a fuss.
- b. I was encouraged to freely express the pain.
- c. I was told to accept it as an inevitable part of life.



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# Exercise: Expectations of Dealing with Pain



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What are the expectation of how individuals dealt with pain, within your family and peer group? (as adults)  
*Mark the statement with which you most associate.*

- a. Pain was not talked about or discussed.
- b. If someone was in pain they were encouraged to freely describe it.
- c. If someone was in pain they would moan loudly in order to demonstrate they were in pain and that they were suffering.
- d. If someone was in pain they were expected to suffer in silence and not make any fuss.

# Summary

*Different individuals have different ways of expressing pain and of dealing with it.*

*These can be influenced by an individual's personality.*

*They are also influenced by their own cultural norms of dealing with pain.*

*Individuals will use a wide variety of words to describe pain, these descriptions can be different depending on someone's cultural background.*

*The ability to describe pain can also be influenced by a person's vocabulary in the language that is being used in any diagnosis.*

A background illustration of five stylized human figures in various shades of brown and tan, holding hands in a line across the width of the slide.

# BROAD DIFFERENTIATIONS BETWEEN CULTURES PATIENT RELATED FACTORS



# Different Ways of Coping with Pain

Two broad terms that can be used are, expressiveness and stoicism.



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# Expressiveness and Stoicism

Two main differences in the way pain is expressed are:

- The expressiveness of pain refers to a wide set of pain behaviors that express the pain to the outside world as a means of projecting the painful condition for others to understand.
- Stoicism ethics have the principle that painful sensations are indifferent. It is natural and normal for us not to want to experience them, but we should silently accept them. Stoicism is connected with cultural or religious beliefs.



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# An example of Stoicism



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**Marcus Aurelius** (Stoic): *“In most cases you should be helped by the saying of Epicurus, that pain is never unbearable or unending, so you can remember these limits and not add to them in your imagination. Remember too that many common annoyances are pain in disguise, such as sleepiness, fever and loss of appetite. When they start to get you down, tell yourself you are giving in to pain.”*

# Exercise: Your Cultural Background

How do you think your own cultural background has influenced the way you deal with both your own and others pain?

*Mark which answers you think describe your thoughts.*

- a. Not influenced it at all.
- b. Has had a strong influence on it.
- c. I deal with my and others pain in a stoic way.
- d. I deal with my and other peoples pain in an expressive way.

# Summary

*There is no right or wrong way for individuals to deal with pain.*

*How we deal with pain can differ but will have been influenced by our life experiences others around us and cultural expectations.*

*We should not expect others to have the same attitude to dealing with pain as ourselves.*

*We should not expect others to use the same words to describe their pain as we do.*



A row of six stylized paper figures in brown, white, and light orange, holding hands in a circle, symbolizing unity and diversity.

# PAIN ACROSS CULTURES



# Pain as a private topic/subject of shame/sign of weakness

- In some cultures, pain and expression of pain is thought to be a personal failure and a weakness.
- Pain is perceived as a consequence of their behaviors.
- Pain is also seen as private topic that needs to be kept as a secret in order not to burden family members and friends.



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# Different meanings attributed to pain

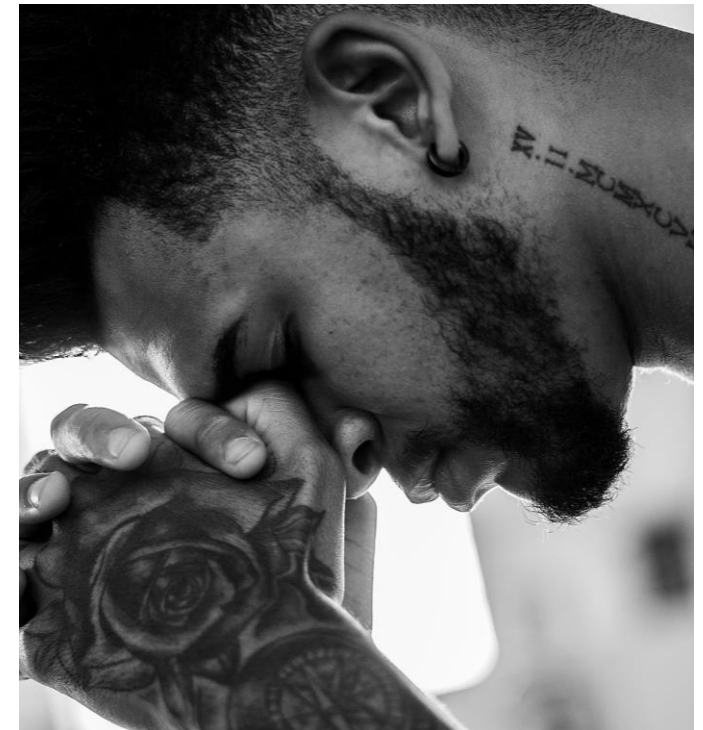
- In some countries and cultures people attribute a meaning to pain, trying to rationalize and cope with pain.
- For example, in Hindu culture, where karma is a common belief, it is sometimes believed that suffering is a reaction to bad actions you have made in the past. This belief promotes acceptance of the pain.
- Acceptance of the pain is associated with better quality of life, especially for those who suffer from chronic pain.

# Different coping mechanisms amongst cultures

Coping mechanisms are the ways each one of us has in order to reduce the physical, emotional and psychological impact that comes from very stressful events. (Pillay et al. , 2015).

These range from:

- **Active coping mechanisms:** self control, ignoring pain, using active coping self-statements, a general sense of internal locus of control (e.g., Caucasians). They tend to be associated with better long-term adjustment. (Sharma et al. ,2018).
- **Passive coping mechanisms:** praying, hoping, diverting (e.g., African-Americans, Hispanic patients).



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# Attitudes to pain across cultures

## In some Arabic cultures:

- Pain is viewed as unpleasant
- They express their pain
- Metaphors or sensory descriptors are used to describe it (ice, fire, like a knife)
- They believe in use of Western medicine
- Are more expressive in front of family members

# Attitudes to pain across cultures (cont.)

## In some European cultures:

- Stoicism
- Do not talk about it
- Hide it from family
- Prefer solitude

## In other European cultures:

- Do not endure pain
- Pain is seen as evil
- Are very expressive
- Request medication



# Attitudes to pain across cultures (cont.)

## In some Asian cultures:

- Sickness is seen as a result of imbalance in the yin and yang
- Use of herbs, oils, massage
- More direct communication of pain with Asians, than with non-Asians
- No expressions of pain. Emotional displays seen as a character weakness

## In some South American cultures:

- Men suffer stoically
- Expression as self-help relief mechanism
- Folk medicine and prayer is used for healing

A row of six stylized paper figures in brown, white, and light orange, holding hands in a circle. The text 'ACCESSING SERVICES' is centered over them.

# ACCESSING SERVICES

# Why some people are reluctant to access services

A distrust of the healthcare services which is a barrier to effective and appropriate management of the disease.

- Research has shown that some people in some cultures have little trust to healthcare services, such as African-Americans. (Defrin et al., 2011) .
- Some minority groups do not readily seek help and are reluctant to participate in pain care programmes. (Carey et al., 2010)




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# Language barriers and literacy issues

- Low literacy is a large barrier when asking for help from healthcare systems. (Ruehlman et al. , 2005).
- The use of cultural descriptors can lead to a wrong appreciation of a patient's health condition and potential problems.
- Lower socioeconomic status and migratory backgrounds are linked to both inefficient communication with healthcare providers and inequalities.



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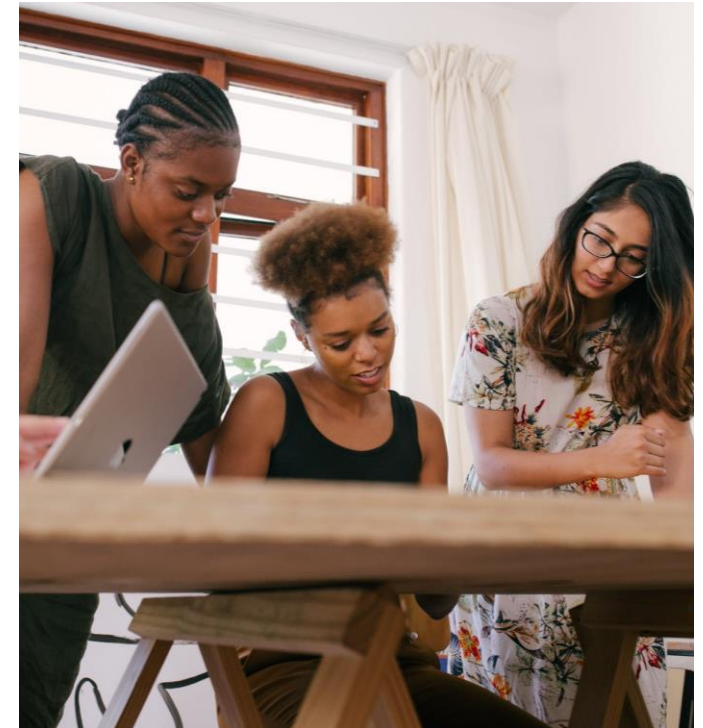
A row of six stylized paper figures in various shades of brown, tan, and white, holding hands in a circle. The figures are simple, with no facial features, and are set against a light blue background.

# INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND PAIN



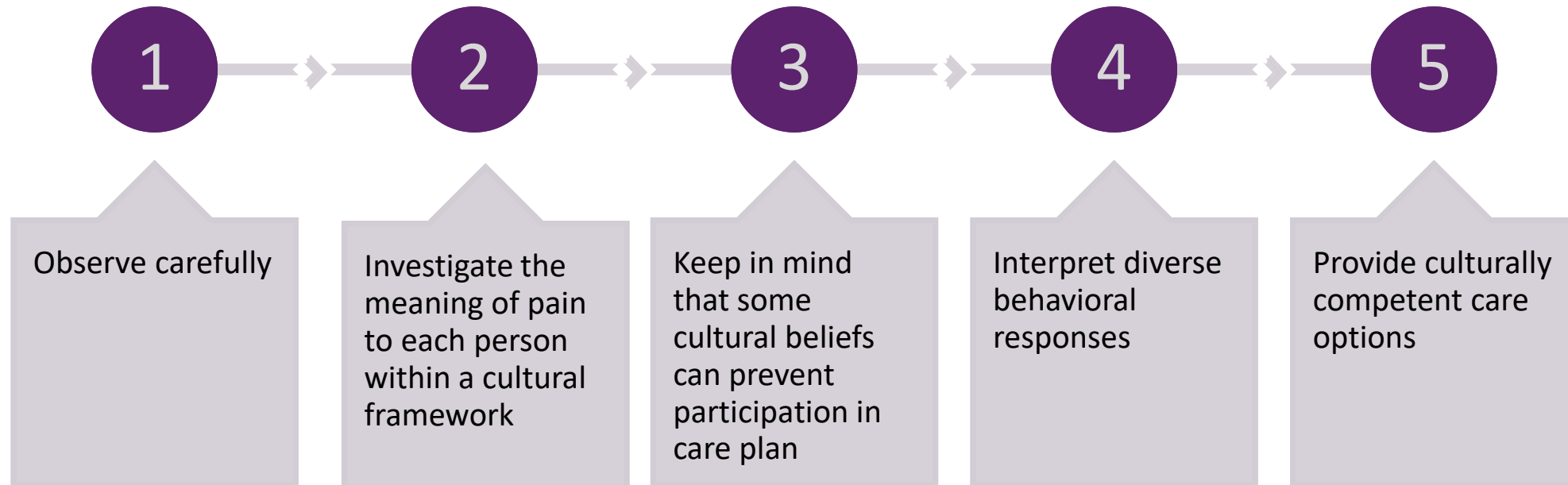
# Intercultural communication and healthcare

- It is impossible for healthcare providers to be aware of and understand all the differences amongst cultures regarding pain and its control.
- It is important to ask patients about their belief systems and let them know that they are accepted, and that care can be adjusted.
- In that way a “cultural clash” of different belief systems will be avoided. (Free M. , 2002).



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# Steps to providing a culturally sensitive service.



# Exercise: Questions to ask

Write down 5 questions that you would you ask to find out more about someone's pain?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Now match your questions to the questions on the next 2 slides.



# Culturally Sensitive Pain Assessment Tool

(Lasch, 2000)

This is a model that has been developed to assess pain with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

What do you call your pain?

What name do you give it?

Why do you think you have this pain?

What does your pain mean for your body?

How severe is it?

Will it last a long or short time?

Do you have any fears about your pain?



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# Culturally Sensitive Pain Assessment Tool

(cont.)

If so, what do you fear most about your pain?

What are the chief problems that your pain causes for you?

What kind of treatment do you think you should receive?

What are the most important results you hope to receive from the treatment?

What cultural remedies have you tried to help you with your pain?

Have you seen a traditional healer for your pain? Do you want to?

Who, if anyone, in your family do you talk to about your pain? What do they know? What do you want them to know?

Do you have family and friends that help you because of your pain? Who helps you?



# Summary

*When working with people from different cultures to your own you cannot assume they are using words to describe their pain in the same way as you would use them.*

*You cannot take what they are telling you at face value.*

*You need to use extra and more specific questions to ensure that you get all the correct information you need.*

*You need to think about their cultural norms of expressing and dealing with pain and filter the information that you are getting through this extra lens.*

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A row of six stylized paper figures in various shades of brown and white, holding hands in a line across the background.

# PROVIDING A CULTURALLY COMPETENT SERVICE

# Exercise: Case Study 1

An immigrant mother brings her 2-year-old child to see the doctor. She tells the doctor that the child is in pain (a severe headache) and suffering from fever. The doctor takes the child's temperature and finds that it is within the normal range. The doctor tells the mother that the child hasn't got a fever and to give the child pain killers that are prescribed for children of his age.

The mother insists that the child has fever and that is why he has a headache and that he has had it for 3 days and needs medicine for the fever.

She feels that the doctor is not taking her concerns for her child seriously and becomes upset with her treatment and the perceived lack of understanding of the fever her child is having.

# Exercise: Dealing with different cultural expressions

*What are the issues that this case study brings up between a care giver and receiver?  
How would you deal with this if you were the care giver?*

What do you think the mother is really trying to explain about her child's illness?

What would you ask first?

What would you ask next?

What would you check out with the mother?

What are you actually trying to find out?

# Exercise: Case Study 2

Alisa is a health care provider working with Yen, a Chinese woman, who has recently been diagnosed with cancer. Yen speaks little English, and her husband translates for her. When her husband is present, Yen denies she is in pain. When he leaves the room, she admits to having pain.

Yen's husband indicates that he has very little faith in the medical community. He believes that pain medications interfere with the body's "natural healing process", he keeps her painkillers out of Yen's reach. Instead, he provides his wife with curative herbal teas.

(Anand et al.,2009)



# Case Study questions

- What do you think are the issues about dealing with pain that are being presented in this case study?
- If you were Alisia, what questions do you think you should ask Yen?
- Do you think it will help if there was an interpreter present?
- What questions do you think you should ask Yen's husband?



# Summary

*People from different cultures use different words to describe the same symptoms.*

*Words in one language don't always translate neatly into another language. The word fever can be used to describe unspecified illness rather than someone with a high temperature when translated from another language into English.*

*Individuals describe pain and illness in different ways.*

*Individuals from different cultures deal with pain in different ways.*

*To understand you need to ask more questions.*

*To understand you need to listen to what is being said and observe how it is being said.*

*As a caregiver it is your responsibility to ensure you have completely understood the situation and any cultural misunderstandings are discussed and resolved.*

# General Summary

*For healthcare providers, cultural awareness involves four components*

- 1. The ability to identify the key cultural values of the patient.*
- 2. An understanding of how cultural values influence a patient and his/her environment.*
- 3. The skills to apply and implement services that are congruent with the patient's value system.*
- 4. The acknowledgement that awareness is a continual journey to learn about different cultural values and how to understand the experiences of others.*

# Reflection and Action plan

Identify 3 things you have learnt from this module.

1

2

3

Write down 3 actions you will take/ behaviours you will change, as a result of your learning.

1

2

3



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# Further Reading

- <https://theconversation.com/how-different-cultures-experience-and-talk-about-pain-49046>
- <https://dailystoic.com/stoicism-and-pain-management/#:~:text=It's%20an%20absolutely%20fundamental%20principle,or%20other%20symptoms%20of%20illness.>

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