Module 8: Cultural and Spiritual Competence

Time Required

2 hours, 15 minutes

Purpose

The purpose of this module is to introduce cultural and spiritual competence as key capabilities for victim service providers. Definitions of cultural and spiritual competence are provided, the importance of cultural considerations in victim service delivery is explored, and barriers to culturally and spiritually competent service delivery, and strategies to address them, are examined.

Lessons

1. Overview of Cultural and Spiritual Competence (30 minutes)
2. Crime Victims and Diversity (30 minutes)
3. Common Barriers to Providing Culturally and Spiritually Competent Victim-Assistance Services (1 hour)
4. Tips and Tools for Culturally Competent Service Delivery (15 minutes)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, participants will be able to:

- Define cultural and spiritual competence.
- Recognize the multidimensional nature of culture.
- Explain the importance of cultural considerations in providing victim services.
- Describe common barriers to providing culturally and spiritually competent services.
- Identify specific skills, strategies, and resources required to serve diverse crime victims effectively.

Worksheets

- Worksheet 8.1: Case Studies (18)
- Instructor Tips for Worksheet 8.1: Case Studies (18) (Instructor Only)

Equipment and Materials

No special equipment or materials are required.

Preparation

- Read Chapter 8, Cultural and Spiritual Competence, in the Participant's Text.
- Prepare tearsheet of large iceberg with waterline so that 1/10 of iceberg is above the waterline.
- Select case studies to be used by the group, based on participants' occupations, demographics of their communities, and those they serve.

Introduction

Ω**Show Visual 8-1**. [this section here is almost identical to the one just above it]

Provide purpose and objectives of this module.

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- Identify specific skills, strategies, and resources required to effectively serve diverse crime victims.

1. Overview of Cultural and Spiritual Competence (30 minutes)

Ω**Show Visual 8-2.**

Ω**Show Visual 8-3. What Do We Mean by Culture?**

Provide the following definition of culture.

> Culture is the shared values, attitudes, beliefs, communication styles, religious practices, and traditions that guide and structure a group or community.

Ω**Show Visual 8-4**. **Cultural and Spiritual Competence**.

Introduce participants to the definition of cultural and spiritual competence that will be used in this module.

Cultural and spiritual competence reflect:

> A process of continuous learning that enables an individual to work effectively cross-culturally; and the ability to function effectively in the context of cultural (including spiritual) differences.

Note that it is impossible to separate the victim's cultural concerns from their spiritual concerns. Spirituality and religion provide a person of faith their world view and way of life.

Case Study #9: Teasing

You are a member of the Interagency Sexual Assault Council and are asked to review a case involving a 14-year-old Latina, Rachel, who is reported to have been sexually assaulted by more than one offender. The offenders are reported to have a history of assault, and the name and address of one of the other victims has been provided by Rachel's mother, Mrs. Peralta.

You understand that Mrs. Peralta and her daughter waited 2 weeks before filing the report. Initially, Mrs. Peralta told the officer that her daughter was being teased by these boys in the neighborhood. "It is so bad," she said, "that my daughter has not slept for 2 weeks. I have asked her to try to forget about it, but she can't. She cries and can't do her schoolwork."

A week later, Mrs. Peralta and Rachel came back and said that the boys had "tried to force themselves on Rachel," and had done the same thing to a 13-year-old girl in the neighborhood. Upon further questioning, it is reported that Rachel and her mother filed a complaint of sexual assault.

The DA's office has dismissed the case on the grounds that the original complaint was filed 2 weeks after the event, was later changed to sexual assault, and the other "victim" did not file a complaint and, when approached, denied any such incident involving her.

The DA believes this is a case of "teasing" and "barrio rivalry."

1. What factors may be preventing Mrs. Peralta and Rachel from reporting the case?

2. Do you think race or gender may play a role in the DA's decision? Why?

3. What strategies could be used to help Mrs. Peralta articulate her story?

4. How might the DA's decision have an impact on future reporting? What long-term strategies can be used to encourage reporting in communities?

Instructor Tips—Case Study #9: Teasing

- For many immigrant families, shame surrounding the reporting of sexual assault makes it difficult to report or even acknowledge such cases; hence the delay in reporting this case. In these instances, they may risk loss of family or community support as the incident is perceived as damaging the family's reputation. Often the assumption is that the victim is at fault. In many cultures, it is customary for certain types of cases to be addressed by the family or community. Additionally, Mrs. Peralta may be unaware of the fact that Rachel's testimony about what happened has value.
- Ask participants to consider whether the reaction from the DA's office would be different if Rachel and Mrs. Peralta were white. African-American? Asian? Is there an element of cultural justification in the DA's response that this is a case of teasing? This is an opportunity to talk about cultural defense versus cultural considerations. Using culture as a justification for sexual assault is dangerous and misleading. Too often this defense relies on stereotypes that violence against women is an accepted and integral part of certain cultures. Unfortunately, such violence is pervasive in all cultures, and almost all cultures have informal and formal systems to curb it. Gender stereotypes may also come into play in the DA's minimizing of the crime. Ask participants what these stereotypes might be.
- Mrs. Peralta and Rachel find it difficult to acknowledge what has happened and to state it makes the acknowledgment final. By going to the DA's office, Mrs. Peralta is communicating something important. Going to the DA's office is a major step for her, one that she has wrestled with for 2 weeks. Mrs. Peralta is trying to communicate something serious through statements such as, "It is so bad that my daughter has not slept for 2 weeks." Had the DA known the cultural stigma associated with reporting sexual assault, she or he may have been able to gently probe or read between the lines and make it easier for Mrs. Peralta to report the crime during the initial visit. The DA's office could have asked for a counselor or other family members to be involved.

Case Study #10: To Walk in Another's Shoes

A robbery is reported at a Sikh temple, and the police are contacted. The police officer enters the temple to record the damage and looks for signs of a break-in. The worshipers and the priest appear angry and refuse to cooperate with the investigation. One of the worshipers finally says, "You are insulting us by wearing your shoes in a place of worship."

1. What are the cultural issues in this case?

2. What can the police officer do in this situation?

Instructor Tips—Case Study #10: To Walk in Another's Shoes

- In this case, it is a religious custom to remove one's shoes before entering a place of worship.
- Although the officer's intention was to help, he or she violated the sanctity of the Sikh temple by entering in the manner he or she did. Although it might be against police procedure and unwise to remove shoes, a respectful initial conversation might have avoided the insult.

If the police had already made the effort to build a relationship with the priest, there would have been a higher level of mutual understanding and respect.

Case Study #11: The Missing Spoons

You have a degenerative muscular disorder and are in a wheelchair. Although you can't drive, you are able to live fairly independently. You have a caregiver, Carla, who comes by once a day, runs errands for you, and helps with other chores around the house. Carla is cheerful and generally quite helpful. However, you begin to notice that things are missing from your house. Since no one else comes to the house except Carla, you suspect she has been stealing from you. You first notice that your sterling silver spoons are gone. Later, you miss a brooch from your dresser and $200 from a drawer in the kitchen.

You call a victim assistance program and, after several minutes listening to tiresome automated messages, a human voice mechanically asks you a series of questions, which you answer. You then describe what you suspect. The woman at the other end of the line is speaking extremely slowly and loudly. She says, "Have you double-checked? Could you just have forgotten where you kept them?" This angers you, and you are already regretting having called. The woman from victim services says they will send someone to your house to investigate the robbery and evaluate if you might need to be moved to an assisted-living facility.

You are furious!

1. What impact might this sort of experience have on reporting by victims with disabilities?

2. What could victim-services personnel have done differently?

Instructor Tips—Case Study #11: The Missing Spoons

- Disabled victims may fail to report crimes for fear they may be perceived as incapable of caring for themselves and be assigned to assisted-living facilities or institutions.
- Automated voice technology can seem distant, frustrating, or confusing to some people, who are relieved when they hear a person's voice. The initial conversation is crucial in setting a tone for subsequent interaction; therefore, the intake person should be warm and empathetic. Operators also need to check their assumptions about disabled victims. In this case, the operator was assuming that the victim may have a mental disability. Also, before rushing to recommend assisted living, victim services personnel need to evaluate the case carefully.
- More extensive outreach by the agency would help educate agency employees about disabled victims and build relationships between the agency and the community.

Case Study #12: Turf Battles

A representative of the victim outreach program in a local police department contacted the owner of a vehicle whose tires had been slashed 3 days earlier. The purpose of the call was to inform the victim of his legal rights and update him on developments in the investigation.

When a man answered the phone with a strong Latino accent, the outreach officer identified himself and asked for the owner of the vehicle. The man hesitated, then identified himself as the owner. He asked suspiciously what he could do for the officer.

The outreach officer said, "Yes. I understand your tires were slashed the other day."

"That's right," answered the vehicle owner. "I already gave my report at the station. You haven't found the criminal yet have you? I didn't expect you guys to get to the investigation for a couple of weeks at least."

"No, but we're working on it. Where was your car parked? I can't tell you how many times this has happened in the gang-infested sections of the city."

"It was parked right outside my house. There weren't any other tires slashed on the street. It was a personal attack, I'm sure."

"Well, you have the right to press charges if we find the guys. But I'm telling you from experience, you get involved with these turf battles, this is the kind of thing that happens. How old are you?"

"I am 23 years old," answered the vehicle owner. "Why?"

"It's always the young ones that get mixed up in this stuff. I wouldn't press charges if I were you. I'd just get out now, when it's still only tires they're slashing."

1. What stereotypes are operating in this interaction?

2. How do the stereotypes prevent the victim from receiving the help and support that he might need?

3. How could the outreach officer work to overcome the victim's stereotypes as well as his own?

Instructor Tips—Case Study #12: Turf Battles

- The victim's stereotypes of the police lead him to assume the worst. He does not expect a call from the police department and doubts the perpetrators will be caught. This prevents him from being open with the outreach officer. The officer hears the victim's accent and immediately assumes the victim is part of a gang war. Instead of reaching out to the victim, he alienates him.
- When victim advocates ask questions before giving advice, they learn a lot about the victims, the crime, and the victims' needs. When an advocate's strategy is to listen first and talk later, he or she can avoid leaping to conclusions that may be based on stereotypes or misinformation.

Case Study #13: Premises Vacated

You are a victim assistance professional in a prosecutor's office. Your office is prosecuting two men and a woman for vandalizing a small hardware store. A month ago, the accused allegedly threw bricks through the windows of a hardware store owned by a Jewish family. They spray-painted the doors and walls with swastikas and slurs against Jews. They nailed boards across the doors and painted on them "Closed" and "Premises Vacated." Your office is trying the case as a hate crime.

You have had difficulty providing assistance to the owners of the store. Your responsibilities are to explain the legal process and their legal rights, and offer some degree of emotional support. You have reached out more than once to the man who reported the crime and invited him to come in for an appointment.

He has said to you, "Put these Nazis in jail, and I'll come for a visit." He says that if you are so interested, the whole neighborhood would like to hear from you. He invites you to come see the destruction and vandalism for yourself. You explain that you have looked carefully at all the pictures, that you are very familiar with what happened there, and that you would need to cancel several appointments in order to make the trip across town. You invite him once again to come to your office.

The man yells into the phone, "If you want to help, help! If you are scared, then so be it. Sit back and let another Holocaust happen. Sit back and call me paranoid. This is exactly how the last one started. You ask anyone here. You ask anyone." Before you can respond, the man hangs up.

1. What are some of the issues in this case? What are the different perspectives of the victim assistance professional and the storeowner? How do these perspectives affect their interaction?

2. What are some realistic strategies the victim assistance professional can employ, given limited time and resources?

Instructor Tips—Case Study #13: Premises Vacated

- The victim assistance professional sees this hate crime as a specific case that must be tried. She or he has a clear definition of the victim (the Jewish owners of the store). The owner, however, sees the vandalism in a larger context. He is aware that, while his family has lost the store, many other Jewish people in the community have been victimized as well. He sees this as a threat to the safety of Jews, not just that of his family. The type of vandalism is reminiscent of the early days of Hitler's rise to power.
- The victim assistance professional first should broaden the operating definition of crime and victim. A simple strategy in talking to the shop owners is to listen and affirm their fears and anxieties. Second, he or she should understand the impact this crime has had on the community. Realizing that the best way to reach the shop owners is through the community at large, she or he might want to find a way to inform the community about the legal proceedings.

Case Study #14: Shattered Glass

You are a transgender female driving through Dupont Circle at 1:00 a.m. You see two men in a scuffle. You slow down to pass them and, trying to be helpful, you roll down your window enough to say, "Come on guys, whatever it is, it's not worth it."

Before you know it, a fist crashes through the window, shattering the glass, and lands on the side of your face. The man who has hit you yells, "You keep out of this you f-----." The other man, bleeding profusely from a cut above his eye yells, "Hey! Do you still have a dick?" followed by a string of profanities. Stunned, you sit at the wheel. Slowly, you pick up your cell phone and call 911.

The police and emergency medical crew arrive in minutes. Seeing the glass, the police come up to you and ask, "Is anyone hurt?" Before the words are out of his mouth, his partner, a female police officer says, "We should have known. It's just one of those d--- queers," and they turn away swearing in disgust.

The police officers proceed to interview the men who had been involved in the scuffle. One of the emergency medical technicians comes up to you and yells to her partner, "You're going to need your gloves for this one. I am not going to risk getting AIDS." The police officer walks back to you and says, "You are being charged with assault. …"

1. What are the assumptions the police officers are making?

2. How might encounters like this have an impact on future reporting by members of the GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender) community?

Instructor Tips—Case Study #14: Shattered Glass

- The police assume the transgender female is the perpetrator, not the victim. This results in revictimizing the victim.
- Negative experiences with law enforcement may make gay, bisexual, lesbian, and transgender victims reluctant to report crimes. As a result, they may wait to report all but very serious crimes. Consequently, the police may see more violence in cases involving gays and lesbians and assume they are prone to more severe violence.

Case Study #15: Cruel Capabilities

You are an elderly white man, living with your son and daughter-in-law. Two years ago, you suffered a major stroke, and since then several smaller strokes have diminished your ability to speak or move around independently.

After the stroke, your son couldn't look at you. He seemed ashamed to talk to you. His wife took over all the care except that which required moving you from your bed to the wheelchair, helping dress you, or bathing you. Your son became rougher and more careless with you as months went by. Once, while moving you into the bathtub, he let your head bang hard against the tub. Another time, he left you for 20 minutes straddled between the bed and your chair as he talked on the phone. Recently, he has refused to help dress you, so you have been left in bed for days at a time.

He complains often about the cost of medicine and doctor bills. You even overheard him saying to his wife, "It's time the old man kicks off."

You are deeply ashamed by your son's disrespect. You wonder if you raised this man who is capable of being so cruel. You think that you must have hurt him terribly in the past for him to act like this.

Yesterday, you received a prescription from the pharmacy. Inside the bag was a leaflet that asked, "Are you the victim of elder abuse?" You look away in disgust without reading the rest of the message.

1. What are some of the factors that obstruct the man's likelihood of finding help?

2. What can victim advocates do to reach people in this situation?

3. What on the leaflet caused the man to stop reading? What are other ways that the leaflet might have been worded?

Instructor Tips—Case Study #15: Cruel Capabilities

- Some of the barriers in this case are physical ability (it is difficult to make a telephone call or initiate contact with the outside world), shame about the situation, and self-blame. Other barriers might be the fear of getting his son into trouble, being moved to an institution, or being judged for raising a son who would act like this.
- Including a flier in pharmacy deliveries is an excellent method of outreach. Other methods used are messages on placemats delivered by Meals on Wheels and fliers delivered by the post office. Some organizations coordinate volunteer "buddy" programs so elderly people can have contact with someone in the outside world. Victim agencies can team up with health care providers to train doctors and nurses to recognize the signs of abuse and provide their patients with information and support.
- The use of the words "victim" and "abuse" may have triggered a negative reaction. Fliers can use softer language, or frame elder assistance programs in the context of strengthening families. For example, the flier could have read, "Having difficulties at home? Are the transitions to old age difficult or sometimes painful for you and your caregivers?"

Case Study #16: A Large Lake

A man comes to your victim services clinic for guidance. His mother recently was killed by a reckless driver, and he hopes to receive advice from you about legal steps he might take.

You begin the intake interview by asking him to talk a little about himself. He tells you that he is middle aged, spent most of his childhood on a Cherokee reservation, is a high school physics teacher, and has lived in the city for 18 years. His mother was visiting him here for a few weeks.

Then you ask him to tell you what happened. He tells you that last night he imagined walking by a large lake, and in the distance he saw a white bear. Walking faster and faster, he tried to reach the bear, but the faster he walked, the more distant the bear became.

You smile and nod, waiting for him to go on. After a period of silence, you ask, "Was your mother hit by the car here in the city?"

"Yes," is the reply. And another period of silence.

"How can we help you? What is it that you need?" you ask.

The man looks at you for a moment, says, "Thank you for your time," and leaves.

1. What were some of the communication issues that made this interaction difficult?

2. What did the victim service provider do that was effective?

3. What might he or she do to be more effective?

Instructor Tips—Case Study #16: A Large Lake

- The man is communicating something important with his story of the bear, but the provider does not understand the message. Some people will be more comfortable discussing feelings, emotions, and needs through images, stories, and symbols. If a victim service provider does not have a shared context with a victim, it is difficult to understand these messages.
- The provider opened the meeting by inviting the man to talk about himself. She or he got valuable information as a result of this open-ended and interested question.
- If the provider had continued to build a relationship, creating a shared context, the message in the story may have been clarified. Second, she or he might have asked the man to talk a little bit more about the image, asking for more detail. Another strategy might be to move from open-ended questions to a more directed approach; rather than relying on the man to articulate his needs (which he might feel he has already done), offer him several options.

Case Study #17: On the School Bus

A 5-year-old second generation Chinese-American child, David, comes home and says that he doesn't want to go to school any more because he has been teased and beaten up on the school bus. His grandfather, a 68-year-old Chinese immigrant, goes to the bus stop with his grandson the next day to identify the children who had teased and hit his grandchild. The grandfather approaches one 8-year-old boy, Tom, pats his head, and tries to ask the boy questions in his halting English. Tom is scared by this old Chinese man and does not quite understand him, so he turns his back and tries to run. The grandfather grabs the boy's arm in an effort to restrain him so he can talk to Tom.

Tom's father reports this incident to the sheriff's office. Sheriff Anderson investigates, but he can't communicate with the grandfather because the grandfather speaks little English. An interpreter is called to help. After the interview, Sheriff Anderson moves the case to court and a date is set for a hearing. The interpreter goes to the court with the grandfather. A public attorney, Mr. Swedlund, is assigned to the case. The interpreter explains the situation to Mr. Swedlund. The interpreter also tries to explain the cultural issues in the case. But Mr. Swedlund says, "Even though an adult may be permitted to grab a child in China, he is in the U.S. This is still an assault." Mr. Swedlund suggests that the grandfather plead guilty so the case will not go to trial. The interpreter explains the suggestions to the grandfather, but the grandfather is totally confused. He believes that he didn't do anything wrong. All he did was grab a boy's arm and try to ask him questions. He is bewildered that he is in the court. "Is this justice?" he asks. "My grandson was beaten and teased to the point that he did not want to go to school. Should not that be the punishable crime?"

When the judge calls the grandfather's name, the interpreter goes with him. The judge asks him questions and the interpreter translates them to the grandfather. However, the grandfather is nervous and confused. The judge asks him the same questions again and the interpreter translates again. The grandfather just stands there and is too nervous to answer the questions. The interpreter says to the judge, "Your honor, he is very nervous, and this is all too new to him. He needs time to think about your questions." The judge says, "Well, you better tell him to answer my questions soon. I am losing my patience." The interpreter translates the judge's words to the grandfather who becomes even more nervous.

1. What are the cultural issues?

2. What are the issues from the grandfather's perspective?

3. What are the issues from the public attorney's perspective?

4. What are the issues from the judge's point of view?

Brainstorm some realistic strategies for the interpreter.

Instructor Tips—Case Study # 17: On the School Bus

- In traditional Chinese culture, when an elder pats your head in a nonthreatening manner, it means that the elder wants you to feel that he or she is friendly and means no harm.
- When elders ask a young person questions, elders expect the youth to stand straight, listen to him or her, and answer the questions. If the youth tries to run away, it is considered very bad manners, and the elder can grab the youth to have his or her questions answered.
- Often, new immigrants are not familiar with U.S. law or culture and find them confusing and intimidating.
- This is a good opportunity to discuss cultural considerations versus a cultural defense. By examining cultural motivations in this situation, providers would not use culture as a rationale or justification, but instead would understand the behavior in its cultural context in order to be knowledgeable and effective in addressing the case appropriately.

Case Study #18: The Intervening Interpreter

You are a child advocate in the victim assistance division of a large child-abuse prevention agency. You have been assigned the case of two Bosnian children who recently arrived in the United States and have been living with a foster family for the past 4 months. The children are sisters; one is 15 years old, the other is 10.

The case was referred to your agency by a social worker in a nearby hospital. The younger of the two sisters arrived at the emergency room with a large cut on her hand that was bleeding profusely. As the nurse was preparing the girl for stitches, he noticed many scars on her arms and legs. The scars appeared to be the result of deliberate cuts. When he asked the girl about the scars, she simply shook her head in confusion.

As the hospital reported that the girl did not seem to speak much English, you bring a Bosnian interpreter with you on your first home visit. The foster parents welcome you warmly, invite you in, and listen attentively as you express your concerns. They say that they had noticed similar scars on both the girls when they came to live with them. They had asked the girls about them, but both had seemed uncomfortable and embarrassed with the subject. They worried that the girls had been victims of abuse within their families or of violence due to the war in the former Yugoslavia.

After your conversation with the parents you ask to meet with the girls. The parents hesitate and suggest that you come back later. You insist firmly, and finally they agree. After the foster parents have left the room, the older girl begins crying and talking quickly to the interpreter. She gestures toward her foster parents' room, and looks over her shoulder nervously. You cannot understand what she is saying, but she seems to be pleading with the interpreter.

The interpreter tells you that the girl is very grateful to her foster parents, that she does not want to be sent back to Bosnia, and that her younger sister simply cut herself accidentally. The interpreter says that the girl insists they are happy.

You feel uncomfortable with the interpreter's translation, as both girls' body language is telling you more. However, this is the only Bosnian interpreter your agency has been able to find.

1. What are some of the issues that may obstruct the child advocate from making an accurate assessment of the situation?

2. How can the advocate learn more?

3. How can the advocate identify and compensate for any bias on the part of the interpreter?

Instructor Tips—Case Study #18: The Intervening Interpreter

- Language is only one of the challenges faced by the child advocate in this case. The children come from a different cultural background than the foster parents, they recently emerged from a volatile region, and they have not been living with the family for a long time. The foster parents could be abusing the children, but they just as likely could have been victims of violence or abuse in their home country. They are possibly suffering from culture shock, homesickness, grief at the loss of family members, and post-traumatic stress disorder. They may be afraid that if they were to report any current abuse, they would be sent back to Bosnia.
- By creating a relationship with the children over time, meeting them regularly, watching for new cuts or signs of recent violence, and gaining their trust, the advocate would be able to learn more about the situation. Relying on nonverbal communication, such as body language, art, and pictures would allow the advocate and the children to bypass the interpreter in some of their interactions.
- Before working with the children, the child advocate should have a conversation with the interpreter to assess any potential bias created by personal experience and opinions. Once the advocate knows that, for instance, the interpreter has recently come from Bosnia and believes that any violence here is preferable to what he or she encountered in Bosnia, compensations can be made in the translation. Often certain words and phrases are not easily translated into English. In such situations, it may be necessary for the interpreter to use many sentences to communicate one word. In this case, the girl spoke a long time with the interpreter while the advocate simply received a summary of the conversation. For a more accurate translation, the advocate could insist that each sentence be relayed.