

https://dspace.org/

Hindu psychologists' perceptions of mental illness.

Padayachee, Priyanka

2011-05-26
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/9949

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Abstract

Conceptualisations of mental illness are not universally applicable, as culture shapes the expression, perceptions and treatment preferences thereof. Thus the application of Western ideas and understandings of mental illness, without integrating the respective culture's beliefs and values, will not result in an understanding of those afflicted. Consequently, if one is to effectively understand diverse communities, an exploration of the impact that spiritual beliefs have on community members' perceptions of psychological disturbance is imperative. By focusing on the perceptions of Hindu psychologists regarding mental illness, this study aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the impact that religious beliefs have on such conceptualisations.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six Hindu psychologists around the Johannesburg area. Responses were analysed using thematic content analysis, which yielded six themes. These were: Identification in a Western framework; Perceptions of psychology in the Hindu community; the role of religion; conflict in negotiating identity; cultural competence; and a unique brand of Hindu psychology. The findings suggest that religion plays a critical role in the understanding and treatment of mental illness. Hindu beliefs around psychological disturbances are considered to be salient. As such, even psychologists who were non-practicing Hindus, were still able to comment on the influence of religion on perceptions of mental illness.

Specifically, it was noted that a conflict existed between psychologists' personal beliefs regarding the cultural expressions of mental illnesses (i.e. spiritual illnesses) and their knowledge of Hindu beliefs and practices. Additionally, it was found that a tension existed between psychologists' awareness of the influential function of religion, particularly amongst collectivistic communities such as the Hindu community, and their occupational understandings and practices, which are deeply rooted in Western thought. Furthermore, it was suggested that the fear of stigma prevented Hindu clients from reaping the benefits of seeking help from culturally competent psychologists.