Using the Culturagram

CULTURAGRAM

GUIDE TO CULTURAGRAM

In analyzing the impact of culture on a specific family, the following factors should be explored:

1. Length of time in the United States
   - A family who immigrated to this country last month, as compared to a family who came many years ago, is more likely to follow the cultural patterns of their country of origin rather than those we frequently associate with Americans. Although some continue to be bicultural, many immigrants begin to assimilate into the larger American culture the longer they live in the United States.
   - It is often important to note that individual family members often arrive in the United States at different times. Frequently a parent comes first and then when financially able sends for children who may have remained behind in the “old country” with grandparents or other relatives.

2. Legal status
   The status of the immigrant is an important factor in completing the culturagram.
   - Some newcomers enter the United States as American citizens.
   - Others enter legally as immigrants under expanded immigrant policies.
   - Some immigrants only have rights to stay for a certain period of time.
   - A final group does not have the proper documentation for immigration, may have entered the country in secret, and may have continual fears of deportation.

3. Reasons for Immigration
   - Families immigrate to the United States for many reasons. Sometimes they move because other relatives have preceded them.
   - At other times conditions in their country of origin, including financial deprivation, political, and religious oppression contribute to their decision to immigrate.
   - The reason for immigration and whether it is possible to return often influences the adjustment of the immigrant family to the United States and should be noted on the culturagram.

4. Age at time of immigration
   Age often affects the degree of acculturation, which occurs among different family members.
   - Children who enter the school system are often very influenced by American culture. In fact, this often produces conflict with parents who may still hold to their original cultural beliefs.
   - On the other hand, an older couple who immigrated to the United States and have no contact with either educational or vocational American institutions may remain very true to their culture of origin.

5. Contact with cultural institutions
   Some immigrant families may attend religious organizations where other members are of from a similar culture. Also some children may be placed in bilingual educational programs. Both factors influence the continued effect of the original culture on the immigrant family.

6. Language spoken at home and in the community
   - Many immigrant families continue to speak their native language only at home, while in the larger community English is spoken.
   - Often children learn English first and they speak English both at home and in the community, while their parents continue to speak their original language.
   - Sometimes one language is used for receptive communication, while another language is used for expressive communication.

7. Values - family, education, and work
   Different cultures have varying value systems, which impact differentially on family members after immigration to the United States.
   - Many cultures stress that family relationships must take precedence over individual achievement.
   - In some immigrant families older children may be seen as caretaker for younger siblings even if their own educational progress is threatened.
   - Also there may be gender differences in terms of educational and vocational expectations for children.
Understanding differing values on vocational achievement and self-actualization is also important in assessing the impact of culture on the family.

8. Health beliefs
Many immigrant families have differing beliefs on health, illness, and treatment, which may differ markedly from the Western medical model of diagnosis and treatment with many Americans accept. The social worker must become cognizant of these differences in order to complete the culturagram.

9. Impact of crisis events
While members from all cultures are affected by crisis events, certainly crises have particular traumatic import for specific cultural groups. For example, some families may have come from countries where they have experienced or witnessed extreme violence. In addition, given the importance of virginity for Hispanic unmarried girls, the crisis event of rape may be especially problematic for Hispanic family. Also, the death of a grandparent may take on greater importance for a family whose culture stresses the veneration of older family members.

10. Holidays and special events
For each culture, certain holidays with specific traditions are stressed. Also certain developmental events such as baptisms or bar mitzvahs may have particular relevance. In analyzing the impact of culture on the family, the social worker must become aware of which occasions are particularly important to the immigrant family and what traditions are followed in celebrating these events.

For more information:


Congress, E. P. (July 1994). The use of culturagrams to strengthen and empower culturally diverse families. Presented at the NASW World Assembly. (Contact Dr. Congress at the Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service, 113 W. 60th Street, New York, NY 10023)