

Cultural Competence in CBT: Does Training Improve Therapist Knowledge, Skills, and Confidence?

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Introduction

- CBT is a well-established intervention for various mental health conditions, yet disparities in access and outcomes persist for clients from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.
- Increasing attention has been placed on adapting CBT and strengthening practitioner skills through self-reflection, culturally informed supervision, and targeted training to promote equitable care (Beck et al., 2016; Beck et al., 2019; Lawton et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2022; Naeem et al., 2023; NCCMH, 2023; Vekaria et al., 2023; Maddage, 2024).
- To support therapists effectively, culturally focused training is essential. However, further research is needed to assess the impact of such training on therapists' knowledge, attitudes, and clinical skills.
- This pilot study explores the effectiveness of a cultural competence training session for CBT therapists.

The Training

- One-day workshop designed to enhance participants' ability to deliver culturally sensitive CBT
- It was delivered online as part the core training timetable
- Informed by the model of cultural competence by Sue (1991), Sue (2001), Sue et al. (2005) & Sue et al. (2020).
- The learning methods utilised combined theoretical content, self-reflective exercises, case examples, vignettes, small group activities, and large group discussions.
- Alongside directed activities, it encouraged the use of supervision, self-reflection, role play and problem-based learning.

Learning Points

Based on the qualitative data about learning points a brief qualitative analysis was used to identify themes around

1. Increased Confidence and Curiosity in Cultural Inquiry

Participants felt more confident and motivated to ask open, respectful questions about culture and identity in therapy. There was an emphasis on being curious and open-minded rather than making assumptions.

2. Reflection on Personal Cultural Awareness and Bias

Many reflected on their own cultural backgrounds and how these influence their therapeutic approach. Awareness of internal biases and values was seen as essential for culturally sensitive practice.

3. Understanding the influence of Culture and Identity

Participants appreciated learning about the multifaceted nature of identity, including aspects like acculturation, internalized oppression, and generational trauma. Culture was recognized as relevant to all clients, not just those from marginalized groups.

4. Practical Application: Adapting CBT Culturally

Participants valued guidance on how to incorporate cultural factors into assessment, formulation, and treatment planning, including adapting CBT protocols sensitively to individual cultural identities.

Discussions

- Training led to significant improvements in self-reported cultural competence, with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.37$), suggesting the intervention had meaningful impact.
- Participants reported increased confidence in exploring cultural issues, asking relevant questions, and reflecting on the client's cultural context
- Qualitative feedback highlighted that the session was thought-provoking, and encouraged reflection on therapists' own cultural identities and assumptions.
- Attendees appreciated practical tools for adapting CBT in culturally sensitive ways, particularly around formulation, language, and identity.
- The findings support the need for ongoing, structured cultural competence training as part of core training and continuing professional development (CPD).
- Further research with a larger sample is underway to enable further evaluation
- A greater body of research is needed to explore the real-world clinical impact of such training and explore other ways to embed cultural competence more deeply across CBT curricula and routine practice.

Methodology

Participants

- Participants were recruited through opportunity sampling from trainees enrolled in the BABCP Level 2 accredited South of Scotland CBT Master's Programme who attended a 1-day training workshop.
- 32 students completed the pre-training questionnaire and 16 completed the post-training questionnaire
- Those who completed both pre- and post-training assessments were included in the final analysis.

Measure

- Cultural competence was assessed using the EMCC-14, a validated tool for healthcare professionals (Pedrero et al., 2020).
- Qualitative data about the training was collected using open ended questions.

Results

Participant Satisfaction

- Average workshop rating: 9.75 / 10
- Participants reported increased confidence in approaching conversations about culture and integrating into CBT practice
- Suggestions included more time for deeper exploration and a request for face-to-face sessions

Cultural Competence Scores (EMCC-14)

- The mean pre-training score was 57.19 (SD = 4.902) and mean post-training score was 62.44 (SD = 4.381)
- The paired samples t-test revealed a statistically significant increase in self-ratings of cultural competence from pre-training to post-training ($t(15) = -5.47$, $p < 0.001$)
- The effect size, calculated using Cohen's d , was 1.37 (95% CI: 0.67 to 2.05), suggesting a large and meaningful impact of the intervention on participants' cultural competence.

"Increased confidence around asking questions around culture"

"Be more culturally curious as it will help with formulating struggles and informing treatment plans"

"The ability to reflect on how my own culture and set of values influence therapy and the outcomes"

"Be aware of your own culture etc. on how you approach therapy and discuss in supervision"

"Being open minded, aware and curious about cultural nuances isn't only relevant with clients who I perceive as marginalised... it's potentially applicable to everyone"

"I loved learning about the importance of understanding people's identity and all the aspects of culture that fall into this."

"Incorporating race, ethnicity and gender into formulation as a possible adaptation of traditional CBT protocols"

"Ways to adapt CBT to be idiosyncratic to the individual's culture & identity"

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