

Cultural Competence for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Professionals: A Review of the CSAP Cultural Competence Series¹

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The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP), formerly known as the Office for Substance Abuse Prevention (OSAP), is an agency of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the Public Health Service of the United States Department of Health and Human Services.³ CSAP has published an impressive array of technical support materials, including a Cultural Competence Series that addresses the topic of “cultural competence” as it relates to substance abuse prevention programs and protocols. At the time of this writing the series is on going. Volume 1 was originally published in 1992 and was re-issued in a revised edition in 1995. Volumes 2,3, and 4 were published in 1995, volume 6 was published in 1996, and volume 5 has not yet been published.

Volume 1 focuses on program evaluation (Orlandi,⁴ et al., 1995), volume 2 crystalizes cultural competence ideas around family-based interventions (Szapocznik, ed. 1995), volume 3 discusses participatory research (Langton, ed. 1995), volume 4 demonstrates the application of the concepts to social work settings (Philleo and Brisbane, eds. 1995), and volume 6 provides updates on methodological issues (Bayer, et al., eds. 1996). Created in furtherance of CSAP’s mission as a lead agency whose goals “are based on the conceptions of no use of any illegal drug and no illegal or high-risk use of alcohol or other legal drugs” (Foreword, by Elaine M. Johnson,⁵ in Jansen, et al., eds. 1992:iii), the series provides suggestions as to how cultural competence can be achieved, demonstrated, and integrated into effective substance abuse intervention practices.

The primary objective of CSAP’s Cultural Competence Series is to “promote the development and dissemination of a scientific knowledge base that assists prevention program evaluators and practitioners in working with multicultural communities.” CSAP sees the volumes as a “groundbreaking series:” opportunities “to formulate effective strategies for AOD professionals,”⁶ to “establish a framework for celebrating the diversity of our United States and the unity within that diversity,”

and to “stimulate new ideas and further prevention efforts among all Americans” (Forward, by Elaine M. Johnson, in Orlandi, et al., eds. 1995:iii). The series “is dedicated to exploring and understanding” the “diverse ethnic heritage” of communities within the United States and “its critically important role in the development of ATOD⁷ problem prevention programs” by means of establishing “a forum for the exchange of knowledge between program developers, implementers, and evaluators” (Forward, by Elaine M. Johnson, in Szapocznik, ed. 1996:v-vi). The series promotes interdisciplinary alliances (Forward, by Elaine M. Johnson, Philleo and Brisbane, eds. 1995:v-vi) and research and service-agency collaboration (Forward, by Phyllis A. Langton and Leonard G. Epstein,⁸ in Langton, ed. 1995:v).

Readers of CSAP’s Cultural Competence Series must resist letting early instances of “political poetics” diminish either the content or tone of the articles in the series. For example, the dedication page of volume 1 reads simply, “To the Unity hidden in diversity,” and the Preface to volume 2 begins with the proclamation, “God’s eternal wisdom provides us with families. Like the forest and the waters, families have existed throughout history and across all cultures” before it declares that culture is “viewed as a context in which to understand the family” and that “it is the primary function and role of culture and society to preserve the family since, without the family, culture and society cannot survive.” The naïve and facile Glossary of Key Terms found on page vi of volume 1—encompassing terms with which the volumes of essays would wrestle!—was not included in the subsequent volumes. Similarly, the instances of political poetics appear to decrease over time. In addition, readers should avoid dismissing volume 2 as simply being a monument to its editor (who authored or co-authored all but two chapters and whose publications are listed as references a total of 67 times throughout the chapters which he authored or co-authored). Every volume contains insightful and useful material. The series established itself as a responsible, scholarly forum for the sharing of field experience and not as a vehicle for a self-reinforcing signature approach driven by political speech making.

Brisbane (1995:ix) writes that "As the 21st century approaches, cultural competence, like computer literacy, is a necessity" and that "a new communication edict of cultural dialogue is part of the professional mandate." Programs serving ethnically-defined groups now exist in an era of increasing "accountability through evaluation" (Fleming 1992:169), and the perception exists that funding sources will in some sense favor AOD abuse programs demonstrating cultural competence. To whatever extent such statements are valid, AOD abuse programs have a vested interest in understanding how the term "cultural competence" is used by CSAP and how cultural competence can be achieved and operationalized.

Authors in CSAP's Cultural Competence Series acknowledge problems with terminologies related to culture, and the various authors in the series discuss aspects of cultural competence using a variety of terms. Although no consistent descriptive terminology is used throughout the series, common themes emerge for the development of culturally and technically competent staff and services. The overall cultural competence focus shifts in specific emphasis among the chapters resulting in a broad range of ideas discussed. The various authors consistently treat the development of the individual of research issues, and of prevention services from a reflective practice approach

Guidance for the operationalization of these themes is provided for a number of populations. Volume 2 discusses issues related to Hispanics. Volumes 2, 3 and 4 discuss Afro-Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans and Alaskan Natives, Asian and Pacific Islanders, and gays and lesbians. Experience gained from fieldwork and over the course of AOD abuse projects are shared, and the insights gleaned from any one chapter are easily transferable to other settings. The volumes read like handbooks, thanks to the decision early-on to give the various authors free rein to share their knowledge. As Orlandi (1992:19) phrases it at the beginning of volume 1, "Each of the authors in this monograph was asked the same question: If you had the opportunity to sit around a table and share what you know about cultural competence and AOD program evaluation with individuals who really wanted to learn more about these areas, what would you say? What follows are their replies."

The series can be ordered free of charge from the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug

Information either by writing to P.O. Box 2345, Rockville, MD 20847-2345 or by faxing a request to 301-468-6433 or by telephone request at 1-800-729-6686 or for TTD at 1-800-487-4889. The stock code numbers are: for volume 1, BKD79, for volume 2, BKD222, for volume 3, BKD177, for volume 4, BKD189, and for volume 6, BKD212.

Notes

1. This review derives from a work in progress by the author entitled: Cultural Competence According to CSAP and CSAT.
2. The author holds an M.A. in anthropology, is employed as a probation officer by the Denver County Court Department of Probation Services, and attends the University of Denver College of Law as an Evening Division student. Consistent with his duties as a probation officer, he maintains certification through the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division of the Colorado Department of Human Services as an Alcohol and Drug Evaluation Specialist.
3. The reorganization of the Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Administration (ADAMHA) into the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), and of the Office for Substance Abuse Prevention (OSAP) into the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) became effective on October 1, 1992. Publication cited in this paper which had been issued since that date but which originally conserved the prior organizational names and acronyms identifying OSAP as their publication source have since been reissued using the present generation of organizational names and acronyms. All references herein use the current designation to identify materials published since October 1, 1992.
4. Dr. Orlandi is the Series Editor for the CSAP Cultural Competence Series.
5. Dr. Johnson is the Director of CSAP.
6. "AOD" is a term-of-art acronym for "alcohol and other drug."
7. "ATOD" is a term-of-art acronym for "alcohol, tobacco, and other drug."
8. Mr. Epstein has been an Associate Editor and Managing Editor for the CSAP Cultural Competence Series.

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