

LEXICON OF CROSS-CULTURAL TERMS IN MENTAL HEALTH



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Lexicon of cross-cultural terms in mental health



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Introduction

Work on assessment, diagnosis, classification, and nomenclature of mental disorders has long been a major component of the work of the World Health Organization's Programme on Mental Health, with particular emphasis on standardization of methods.¹

In 1992, after more than a decade of development and testing, WHO published *The ICD-10 Classification of Mental and Behavioural Disorders: Clinical Descriptions and Diagnostic Guidelines*.² That publication represented a significant advance towards the achievement of a "common language" for use by mental health professionals and other workers worldwide; it has been developed in several versions³—for different categories of users—and translated into many languages. A set of diagnostic instruments intended for use by clinicians and researchers in different cultures and settings has also been produced,⁴ together with training materials intended to facilitate use of the classification.

Both the classification and the instruments use terms that require precise definitions if they are to be capable of reliable use across cultures. These definitions have been produced by a process of international collaboration and consensus-building and published in a number of lexicons and glossaries related to the *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, Tenth Revision (ICD-10)*.⁵⁻⁸ The scope and coverage of these publications are described in detail elsewhere.⁹

The present publication is a new member of that series of lexicons and glossaries and has been developed to provide definitions of the terms used in cross-cultural psychiatry, in comparative research, and in the application of ICD-10 in various cultural settings. It covers: diagnostic terms that describe disorders with a different prevalence or different clinical picture in different cultures

¹ Sartorius N. The classification of mental disorders in the Tenth Revision of the International Classification of Diseases. *European psychiatry*, 1991, 6:315-322.

² *The ICD-10 Classification of Mental and Behavioural Disorders: Clinical Descriptions and Diagnostic Guidelines*. Geneva, World Health Organization, 1992.

³ Sartorius N. *Understanding the ICD-10 Classification of Mental Disorders: a pocket reference*. London, Science Press, 1995.

⁴ Janča A, Üstün TB, Sartorius N. New versions of World Health Organization instruments for the assessment of mental disorders. *Acta psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 1994, 90:73-83.

⁵ *Lexicon of psychiatric and mental health terms*, 2nd ed. Geneva, World Health Organization, 1994.

⁶ *Lexicon of alcohol and drug terms*. Geneva, World Health Organization, 1994.

⁷ *SCAN glossary*. Washington, DC, American Psychiatric Press (published on behalf of WHO), 1994.

⁸ Isaac M, Janča A, Sartorius N. *ICD-10 symptom glossary for mental disorders*. Seattle, Hogrefe & Huber (published on behalf of WHO), 1996.

⁹ Janča A, Sartorius N. The World Health Organization's recent work on the lexicography of mental disorders. *European psychiatry*, 1995, 10:321-325.

(e.g. sensitiver Beziehungswahn); concepts important to the understanding of human experience in a sociocultural context (e.g. enculturation during child development); terms that describe cultural values or customs relating to mental health; terms that may cause problems for clinicians attempting to classify them as symptoms (e.g. flashback); and syndromes that are part of the traditional lay categories of illness in particular cultures or cultural areas. A number of terms already covered by the other WHO lexicons and glossaries are also included, but are addressed from a cross-cultural and comparative standpoint. The use of bold type for any term within a definition indicates the existence of a lexicon entry for that term.

A list of selected references is given at the end of the lexicon. This is intended as an entry to the relevant literature rather than as an exhaustive list of important publications, and includes seminal manuscripts, exemplary research projects, and review articles on cross-cultural aspects of mental health.

The initial list of terms in this lexicon was compiled after an extensive survey of the cross-cultural psychiatric literature, including existing lexicons and glossaries. The main criterion for inclusion of terms was frequency of use in the literature; no attempt was made to provide comprehensive coverage of all terms used in the field. Drafts of the lexicon were circulated to more than 20 individuals known for their interest and expertise in the areas of cross-cultural psychiatry and lexicography, and the text was finalized only after a number of meetings between these experts and the lexicon's editors.

It is unlikely that every psychiatrist or other mental health professional will find that all definitions correspond to his or her own understanding or usage of terms. Nevertheless, a working compromise is essential if a "common language" is to be established for purposes of communication. This lexicon is an attempt to achieve that compromise, and it is hoped that it will contribute to better understanding and collaboration among psychiatrists and their professional colleagues throughout the world.

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Definitions of terms

acculturation The process of **culture change**, whether of an individual or of a group, as a result of continuous contact between members of culturally distinct groups.

See also: assimilation; integration; marginalization; separation

acculturation failure Inability to adapt to another **culture**, usually including difficulty in using its **language** and reluctance to accept its **norms** and **values**.

acculturation maladjustment Excessive slowness or inadequacy in adapting to the demands of a new environment or **culture**, **identity crisis**, and/or social **marginality**.

acculturative stress Stress during the process of individual or group **acculturation**, which may be due to factors in the acculturating group (e.g. difficulty in modifying their **cultural identity**) or in the other group (e.g. opposition to **integration** of the acculturating group).

achieved status *See* status, achieved.

adaptation The process by which individuals or populations make biological, behavioural, or psychological adjustments to survive in a particular setting or **culture**.

adolescence A transitional period between childhood and adulthood, usually but not always corresponding to psychological changes of puberty, with duration ranging from some months to as long as 10 years.

adolescent alienation *See* alienation, adolescent.

affinal kin *See* kin, affinal.

age grades Culturally recognized and socially constructed stages in the life cycle (e.g. childhood, **adolescence**, marriage age, middle age, old age, retirement age) that mirror biological changes.

age role Social behaviours, obligations, and functions specific to an **age grade** within a **culture** (e.g. voting, parenting).

Definitions of terms

age sets Cohorts of individuals who move through **age grades** together, such that their particular history and experience cause a particular age set to differ in certain respects (e.g. average height, attitudes, beliefs) from adjacent age sets.

aggression Hostile, threatening verbal and/or behavioural attack by one person or group against another; aggression is usually forbidden within the cultural group but may be sanctioned if directed outside the group.

alexithymia The individual's inability to perceive his or her own affect or anxiety, often related to previous violence or threat (e.g. child abuse, combat, rape, refugee flight).

alienation Lack of meaningful relationships between the individual and others in his or her society or **culture**.

alienation, adolescent Antipathy or even hostility towards one's own society or **culture** during **adolescence**.

alien's paranoid reaction Paranoid symptoms occurring as a result of relocation to a foreign community or **culture**, and seen in guest workers, foreign students, **refugees**, and other **migrants**.

altered state of consciousness Temporarily reduced awareness of external stimuli, induced by psychoactive substances or by various psychological exercises; sometimes induced for religious or healing purposes.

See also: trance

altruism Individual or group acts of self-sacrifice for the benefit of others, largely determined by the **values** of a **culture**.

altruistic homicide *See* homicide, altruistic.

altruistic suicide *See* suicide, altruistic.

amok A sudden, unprovoked, indiscriminate, murderous assault on associates and strangers, occurring mainly in south and south-east Asia. Pre-amok brooding following some perceived slight or insult and post-amok amnesia may occur, but not invariably.

Synonyms: cafard (Polynesia); iich' aa (Navajo peoples of North America); mal de pelea (Puerto Rico)

animism A world view in which humans, animals, and significant topographical features (e.g. mountains, forests, great trees, deep rivers, oceans) each

possess their own spirit or *anima*, which transcends death and is capable of acting in **preternatural** ways to alter the course of events.

See also: sorcery

anomic depression A chronic dysphoric state that occurs in the context of **anomie** and is characterized by discouragement, defeat, low self-esteem, and moral **disorientation**.

See also: deculturation

anomic suicide *See* suicide, anomic.

anomie Cultural disintegration, caused internally and/or externally, so that cultural **norms**, **values**, and mores no longer possess meaning for or influence over a people; lawlessness and dissension in a society due to conflicting norms; absence or weakening of an individual's norms or values, characterized by anxiety, isolation, and personal **disorientation**.

See also: alienation; deculturation; identity

anthropophobia Literally, fear of people; typically involves an aversion to being looked at by others or having face-to-face interaction with others.

See also: taijin-kyofu-shou

antisocial Refers to a condition of being against society, resulting in behaviour that disrupts the social order (e.g. illegal acts).

Arctic hysteria *See* pibloktoq.

asceticism Denial or avoidance of pleasurable experiences for religious or cultural reasons.

ascribed status *See* status, ascribed.

asocial Refers to a condition of indifference to social experience and customs, leading to certain dysfunctional, but not necessarily harmful, behaviours (e.g. social withdrawal, idiosyncratic grooming or dress).

assimilation A psychosocial process by which a dominant cultural or **ethnic group** absorbs a non-dominant group, thus forming a single cultural or ethnic group.

See also: acculturation; identity

ataque de nervios A Latin American syndrome that includes emotional lability, verbal or physical **aggression**, and a sense of heat rising from the chest into the head, often precipitated by a traumatic event, by sudden unexpected loss, or by family conflict (e.g. divorce, separation, death).

attachment behaviour See behaviour, attachment.

baa tsche See latah.

back translation A procedure for checking the adequacy of a **translation**, in which translated material is translated back into the original language; the translators for the back translation should be new to the material.

behavioural norm See norm, behavioural.

behaviour, attachment Social behaviour related to the affective link between an infant and his or her care-givers.

behaviour, dissocial Behaviour undertaken for some personal benefit, despite deleterious effects on the family, community, or greater society; examples include stealing, lying, failing to meet social commitments.

behaviour, illness See illness behaviour.

behaviour, type A See type A behaviour.

belief, cultural See cultural belief.

belief, delusory cultural See cultural belief, delusory.

belle indifférence In French, an apparent lack of concern about disabling (usually somatic) symptoms, often accompanying dissociative or conversion disorders.

See also: alexithymia

berdache Among some indigenous peoples of North America, a person with a male **sexual identity** who has assumed a female **gender role** (i.e. dressing like a woman and performing tasks traditionally done by women).

See also: gender role; sexual identity

bereavement, cultural See cultural bereavement.

berserk In Scandinavia, a sudden outburst of violence against other people and destructiveness towards property.

See also: amok

bicultural Possessing the **values, norms**, information, experiences, and skills of two cultural or **ethnic groups**. This occurs in several circumstances (e.g. having parents of two different ethnic or cultural groups, growing up in a

family of one cultural group while attending school or working in a community of another ethnic or cultural group).

bilateral family system *See* family system, bilateral.

bilineal inheritance *See* inheritance, bilineal.

bilingual Being fluent in two **languages**, with the implication of being familiar with the **cultures** associated with the two languages.

bilingual test-retest A means of assessing a psychometric **translation** by having people familiar with both **languages** (i.e. the original and the translated languages) complete the same test in both languages; the two results for each individual are then compared with each other in order to assess similarity or discrepancy between the results.

bisexuality Sexual activity with members of both sexes.

blindness, cultural *See* cultural blindness.

body language The communication of thoughts and feelings through gestures, body posture, and body movements.

bouffée délirante An acute, transient, psychotic condition associated with clouding of consciousness, psychomotor excitement, and agitated behaviour, followed by nonorganic amnesia and good prognosis; originally reported in Africa.

brain fag From "brain fatigue", a malady among students characterized by symptoms in the head (from a feeling of burning to **hallucinations** of worms crawling in the brain), eye symptoms (from tearing to pain), inability to read, impaired recent memory, and fatigue despite adequate rest; originally described in anglophone Africa. *Surménagement* is a similar lay entity in francophone settings.

brainwashing The use of social isolation, threat, exposure, starvation, sleeplessness, and torture to change a prisoner's morale, self-esteem, thoughts, feelings, attitudes, or behaviour.

bride price The money or property given by a groom's family to the bride's family at the time of marriage; in patrilineal clans, a quit-claim by the bride's family towards any children of the union.

bruja *See* sorcery.

burnout A modern colloquial term for a syndrome of physical, emotional, or attitudinal exhaustion characterized by impaired work performance, fatigue, insomnia, depression, increased susceptibility to physical illness, and reliance on alcohol or drugs of abuse for temporary relief with a tendency for this to escalate into physiological dependence, and, in many cases, suicide. This North American syndrome is generally considered to be a stress reaction to unrelenting performance and emotional demands stemming from the individual's excessive devotion to his or her occupation, with a concomitant neglect of family and recreational life.

cafard *See* amok.

cargo cult Socio-religious movement in which a central belief involves the delivery of "cargo" by a deity; first described in the South Pacific during the Second World War, when native islanders observed ships and planes delivering "cargo" to combatants in that area.

cargo cult syndrome In a psychiatric patient, the delusion that he or she will receive great unearned wealth.

cargo thinking The expectation that material goods should or will be forthcoming without effort on one's own part.

caste An endogamous unit within a society, which is characterized by specific prestige, occupations, and social **status**.
See also: endogamy

change, culture The modification of **norms**, **values**, customs, beliefs, world view, technology, and other aspects of **culture**; it may occur slowly and in an orderly manner, or rapidly with dislocation and chaos.
See also: change, social

change, social Change in social institutions (e.g. economics, education, health services, law) and/or the relationship of the individual to social institutions (e.g. obligations, responsibilities, freedoms).
See also: change, culture

chibih *See* susto.

cluster suicides *See* suicides, cluster.

communication, nonverbal *See* nonverbal communication.

compensation neurosis *See* neurosis, compensation.

competence, cultural *See* cultural competence.

concubinage A culturally approved practice in which an extramarital partner lives within the **extended family** as a **fictive kin** member, but in the absence of any formal or legal relationship.

See also: kin, fictive

confidentiality Social imperative for secrecy regarding certain knowledge, such as clinical information regarding medical or psychiatric patients.

connotation The feeling or symbolism associated with a word or phrase, independent of its denotative meaning; important in **translation** of psychiatric assessment instruments.

See also: equivalence; translation

consciousness, altered state of *See* altered state of consciousness.

contagion Originally applied to infectious disease, this term is often applied to the spread of psychiatric conditions; the spread occurs either (1) rapidly in a group of similar individuals, or (2) from one **ethnic group** known to express the condition to another group in which the condition has been absent.

contagion, delusion of Delusion of having acquired a disabling or fatal infection or infestation as a result of contact with infected persons or contaminated materials.

contagion ritual A culturally prescribed **ritual** designed to prevent magical **contagion** (e.g. isolation of menstruating women, hiding the placenta after childbirth).

countertransference, cultural *See* cultural countertransference.

couvade Culturally sanctioned **sick role** in the husband of a pregnant or recently delivered woman; may occur episodically in **cultures** without a couvade tradition.

See also: age grades

criminalization The assignment of criminal **status** to some psychiatric patients or other socially deviant persons due to **asocial** or **dissocial behaviour**.

See also: asocial

cross-cultural psychiatry *See* psychiatry, cross-cultural.

cult Originally, a system of religious worship, a creed, or a sect; recently the term has been applied to sects newly established by charismatic leaders

who demand total devotion and foster strong dependence among their followers.

cult, cargo See cargo cult.

cult, zar See zar cult.

cultural belief An unsubstantiated but widely held belief within a particular **culture**, which may be mistaken for a **delusion** by a clinician not familiar with that culture.

cultural belief, delusory A **delusion** in which **cultural beliefs** are manifest (e.g. a delusion that one's moment-to-moment behaviour is controlled by a malevolent spirit); such a delusion is often more acceptable to the social unit than one that would be viewed by others as being patently impossible.

cultural bereavement The self-limited grieving response developed by an individual on leaving his or her own **culture**.
See also: culture shock

cultural blindness A person's inability to perceive cultural characteristics in others belonging to different **cultures**.
See also: ethnocentrism

cultural competence An individual's ability to function within a particular **culture**.

cultural countertransference The clinician's emotional responses to the patient as a function of the clinician's **culture**, the patient's culture, and the inter-cultural histories of their respective groups.
See also: cultural formulation; cultural transference

cultural deprivation Failure of the **culture** to provide survival skills to the developing human being in a particular society, and failure to gratify essential needs (e.g. for **identity**, work, security, self-esteem, social **status**).
See also: alienation; anomie; identity; pseudomaturation

cultural determinism The view that human development, psychology, and behaviour are determined by **culture**, with little or no contribution from biological or psychological factors; an opposite concept to that of biological determinism or psychological determinism.

cultural diffusion The spread of cultural traits (including psychiatric syndromes, diagnostic categories, treatment methods) through contact across societies.
See also: contagion

cultural formulation That aspect of psychiatric assessment that includes a patient's **cultural identity**, social **role** or function, explanation for the illness, **cultural transference** and **countertransference**, and cultural implications for diagnosis and treatment.

cultural identity *See* identity, cultural.

cultural lag Persistence of a custom or **norm** beyond its time of functional contribution to the society or **culture** (e.g. idealization of large families in a crowded society).

cultural pathogenicity Cultural practices that elicit, favour, or precipitate psychiatric disorder.

See also: norm conflict; role conflict; status inconsistency

cultural pluralism *See* pluralism, cultural.

cultural psychiatry *See* psychiatry, cultural.

cultural relativism The view that different **cultures** and their various manifestations are all equally valid in their prescriptions for behaviour.

cultural transference The patient's feeling towards the clinician based on the patient's attitudes towards his or her own **culture** and towards the clinician's culture (or that which the patient perceives to be the clinician's culture); may be influenced by historical relations between the patient's and the clinician's cultures.

See also: cultural formulation; cultural countertransference

culture The totality of all the beliefs, behaviours, and **values** transmitted among the members of a group by learning; it includes systems of ideas and meaning.

culture-bound syndrome *See* syndrome, culture-bound.

culture change *See* change, culture.

culture, guilt-based **Culture** in which the individual experiences remorse and a loss of self-esteem through failure to behave in a socially acceptable fashion.

See also: culture, shame-based

culture, mainstream In a **multiethnic** society, those shared aspects of the larger society (e.g. government, history, **language**, law, public education).

culture-related syndrome *See* syndrome, culture-related.

culture, shame-based **Culture** in which the individual's failure to behave in a socially acceptable fashion brings disgrace to his or her family, peers, or other social group.

See also: culture, guilt-based

culture shock The distress experienced when a person suddenly leaves a familiar **culture** for an unfamiliar one; typically, distress does not begin for some weeks but may then persist over a period of months.

See also: cultural bereavement

curse An invocation intended to bring spiritual or magical harm upon a person or object.

See also: sorcery; witchcraft

deculturation Loss of traditional **culture** as people subscribe to new or foreign cultural features; first applied in Africa, it refers to adoption of the superficial behaviours, **values**, and material culture of industrialized societies and concurrent abandonment of core aspects of the original culture.

See also: anomie

delusion Persistent false beliefs not amenable to change through knowledge or experience; these can be difficult to distinguish from **cultural beliefs**.

See also: cultural belief

delusional content Specific details and information contained in a **delusion**; these often contain culture-specific material (e.g. regarding spirits, ghosts, ancestors).

delusion of contagion *See* contagion, delusion of.

delusory cultural belief *See* cultural belief, delusory.

depression, anomic *See* anomic depression.

deprivation, cultural *See* cultural deprivation.

determinism, cultural *See* cultural determinism.

deviance Behaviour that deviates significantly from that considered normal within a **culture** (e.g. rule-breaking, censured or stigmatized conduct, or adoption of marginal roles).

See also: norm; normality