



EP 2

and to fight racism. Therefore, when working with Indigenous People, the social worker needs to understand the history of oppression and current racism and its effect on contemporary communities (Weaver, 1998). Similarly, Mexican Americans' long endurance of oppression, racism, discrimination, and prejudice, as well as their current experiences of social injustice based on race, contribute to the outlook, experiences, opportunities, and behavior of Mexican American clients and must be given attention in the practice realm. It is also important to recognize the enduring effects of such historic events as displacement and colonization, in addition to current experiences of racism, in the lives of Mexican Americans.



EP 5a

LO3 Refugees may have been traumatized by their experiences in their homelands and stressed by the need to adapt to a new environment. Often refugees have also faced racism in the United States. People who work with refugees must understand the many micro, mezzo, and macro factors that affect their lives. This includes living in a new culture, a history of trauma, difficulty navigating systems, and a lack of social supports (Potocky-Tripodi, 2012). Increased restrictions on undocumented people have caused growing fear of contact with authorities. This has increased since the 2016 presidential campaign and election. For social workers, this has meant that connecting immigrants to social services and government resources has become much more difficult. This calls for new sensitivities about immigration and legal status.

Barriers to Service Research suggests that social services, particularly mental health services, are underutilized by people of color for a variety of reasons. There are differing cultural understandings of mental illness and appropriate treatment that can affect whether people seek treatment. There are also different levels of stigma related to mental illness in some communities, and mistrust of the mental health system due to past mistreatment. Cultural values can shape a person's approach to mental health treatment. For example, in more collectivist cultures, seeking individual therapy may be discouraged (Leong & Kalichman, 2011).

In spite of such underutilization, the needs of people of color are at least as significant as the needs of the majority population. Indeed, because people of color must deal with racism, they may experience issues not faced by whites. A challenge for practitioners is to bridge the gap between service providers and the people from diverse cultures who need services but are reluctant to use them (see Boxes 5.1 and 5.2).

LO4 Religious beliefs can also be a barrier to seeking service. Interpretations of mental illness can be shaped by one's religious beliefs. This can include a belief in treating mental illness with prayer or sufficient willpower. Some people may be concerned that practitioners will challenge their religious beliefs or that their religious practices (such as praying at a certain time) will not be allowed if they are in an inpatient setting (Ayvaci, 2017).

There has been long history of oppression and lack of understanding of historical and current realities by social work and other social service practitioners. This has resulted in a lack of trust by some members of oppressed

Box 5.1 From the Field

Cultural Divide Lily Perez-Freerks, MSW

During my second year of graduate study in social work, my internship placement involved community action efforts in a low-income, primarily Latino neighborhood. The organizational effort was centered on the local elementary school through its welcome center. The administration of the school had requested assistance in recruiting Latino parents as volunteers. It was unclear why the many Latino parents did not support the school through volunteerism. I met with the staff community worker to discuss strategies to mobilize Latino parents to participate in neighborhood organizing efforts and to volunteer time at the elementary school. The community outreach worker and I were both Latino women, and we both wanted to empower the Latino parents by unifying their voices to effect social change.

As time went on, I became more confused about why the parents would not attend neighborhood meetings or participate in PTA meetings and other school activities. They seemed willing to donate time to the welcome center in exchange for food boxes and school uniforms for their children. Yet it remained a challenge to engage them as volunteers in the school. My efforts to participate in the neighborhood partnership meetings seemed futile. I attended several meetings, feeling invisible. Rarely did any of the meeting participants make eye contact with me or give me any hint of recognition. The school vice principal did not address me by name or welcome me in any meaningful way. I began to wonder if my race had anything to do with this, as the meetings were attended mostly by Caucasians and business leaders. I even wondered if my attire of jeans and T-shirt projected a negative image. I later ruled out clothing as a factor; professional attire elicited no more of a welcome.

I shared my experiences and frustration with the community worker at lunch one day. She became very quiet and then said that she might understand the situation. She began to talk about the time when Latino parents were excited about assisting the teachers and helping the children learn. They told the community worker that they did not feel welcome in the classroom and that they had been in the way. When the community worker shared this with the vice principal, she was told that the Latino parents did not have to work in the classroom; there were other needs on the campus that these parents could help with. Specifically, the Latino parents could pick up trash on the campus or clean the bathrooms.

Shock and anger led to rage. I could not speak. I felt like I was suffocating. We sat in silence, not knowing what to say. Eventually, I was able to say in Spanish, "To clean bathrooms, I can stay at home and do that. My brother companion bought and responded in Spanish, "That's just what the parents say."

Minutes later we were asked to meet with the vice principal to review the welcome center activities. As we entered the office, I noticed a pale blue crystal apple on her desk. I introduced myself to the vice principal and sat down. As the women talked of upcoming projects, I reflected on the symbolism of that glass apple. My rage manifested as I thought the urge to turn the barrel toward blue-eyed women who was acting as my gender oppressor. Her face is imprinted on my mind. I can still see the pale blue crystal apple on the mahogany desk. That glass apple may have once symbolized femininity, but it still borest symbolic ignorance to me.

Box 5.2 What Do You Think?

How did school personnel view the "it" of the Latino families in their school? What discrimination would you recommend to deal with this situation?

groups of the ability of the social service system to adequately meet their needs. One example of this can be seen with members of the transgender community. Transgender people have been pathologized, mistreated, and mistreated within the system (Dickey, Karasik, & Sharon, 2017). Thus, they may lack trust in the system and be reluctant to come to for needed services.