

CASE STUDY 1*continued*

Providing culturally competent services to the Latino/a community, as Agency X is now trying to do, will merely open the floodgates of additional demands for services. The current position holder suggested: "The agency doesn't realize that this is only the tip of the iceberg." It is likely that Agency X will soon be faced with adding bicultural, bilingual staff to meet the growing need. In this regard, two caveats should be offered. First, culturally sensitive workers and those assigned caseloads of individuals from non-Euro-American cultures tend to work most effectively and creatively when they are allowed maximum flexibility, leeway, and discretion in how they carry out their duties. Rules and policies established in the context of serving Euro-American clients may be of little help and possibly obstructive to working with culturally different groups. Second, the existence of a defined cultural expert in an organization should not be viewed in any way as a justification for not actively pursuing the cultural competence of the agency in general and its staff.

CASE STUDY 2

The second case study, drawn from the work of Oakland psychiatrist Terry A. Kupers, deals with prisons, mental health, and institutional racism. Kupers (1999) argues that a disproportionate number of mentally ill individuals reside in prison, receive limited or no treatment, and decompensate as a result of the trauma and stress of life behind bars. These same conditions cause previously normal inmates to regularly experience "disabling psychiatric symptoms as well" (p. xvii). Especially dramatic is the impact of these conditions on Prisoners of Color.

According to Kupers, "Racism permeates the criminal justice system" (p. 94). People of Color are more likely than Whites to be stopped, searched, arrested, represented by public defenders, and receive harsh sentences. Incarceration rates are badly distorted, as 50% of the current prison population is African American, 15% is Latino/a, and Native Americans are dramatically overrepresented in relation to their numbers in the general population. It is estimated that by the year 2020, one third of African Americans and one quarter of Hispanics aged 18 to 34 years will be in the criminal justice system. The numbers grow even more disproportionate as the level of incarceration becomes more severe. For example, minimum security units are primarily White, "whereas the super-maximum security units contain up to 90 or 95% blacks and Latinos" (p. 95).

The prisons themselves are replete with racial tensions, and "racial lines are drawn sharply" within the institutions (p. 93). For their own protection, prisoners self-segregate along racial lines and gangs dominate the political landscape. When tensions rise in the prison yard, inmates "quickly join the largest group of their own race they can reach" (p. 96). Some analysts suggest that racial tensions are kept alive within the system as a means of social control, and that there are many little things that keep Blacks and Whites angry at each other. The bottom line, according to Kupers, is that "race matters very much, to everyone" (p. 96).

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