



INVITATION

Most of us live today in multiethnic environments, in which cultural variations in the expression of psychopathology can be directly observed by the average practitioner, and in which problems in communication and diagnostic approach to persons with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds are being experienced on a daily basis.

Although the prevalence of common mental disorders does not seem to be increased in ethnic minorities, there is substantial research evidence that the occurrence of psychosis is indeed more frequent, at least in some migrant groups, and that social isolation and discrimination contribute to this increased prevalence.

Increasingly widespread is also the awareness of the ethnic and cultural variations in the response to the most common psychotropic medications, which is certainly a matter of genetic polymorphisms, but also a consequence of the impact of a variety of environmental factors.

Nowadays most trials of psychotropic drugs are multicentric, and an increasing number of them are carried out in various regions of the world. However, ethnic variations in response to the tested drugs are rarely a focus of attention in these trials. Moreover, treatment guidelines produced in North America and Europe are often regarded as universally valid, and rarely adapted to other regional contexts or to ethnic minorities.

There is also emerging evidence that the most common psychotherapeutic techniques may be not equally adaptable to the needs of ethnic minorities. Cognitive behavioural interventions, for instance, may prove to be more flexible than psychodynamic psychotherapies. On the other hand, psychosocial interventions may pose special problems if the patient belongs to an ethnic minority, although this issue has been relatively neglected by research up to now.

The World Psychiatric Association is grateful to the organizers of this Congress, which provides a comprehensive overview of all these emerging issues, and encourages further international educational and research efforts in this area.

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