Special Considerations: Cultural Considerations

Youth & Digital Technology: Growing Up Online Toolkit

Cultural Considerations

The rapid advancement of digital technology prioritizes the quantity and speed of information exchange, often at the expense of accuracy and comprehensive analysis [1]. This raises an important question: Is digital technology fostering a global culture of connection and acceptance, or is it reinforcing narrow perspectives by limiting exposure to differing viewpoints?

Global Digital Culture

Cultural backgrounds, beliefs, world views, global geography, and family dynamics shape how individuals perceive and use digital technology. Social determinants of health, including income, education, social support, and coping skills, also influence children, youth, and families' access to and use of digital technology [2].

Despite global connectivity, algorithms personalize information based on users' interests, reinforcing existing beliefs while filtering out opposing perspectives [3]. This can create digital echo chambers, limiting critical analysis and exposure to diverse viewpoints.

New Immigrant Youth

Recent immigrants, who make up 23% of Canada's population, have unique mental health needs impacted by their family, culture, health-seeking behaviours, world views, and previous exposures [4]. As of 2016, 37.5% of children 14 years and younger were born outside of Canada or had at least one parent born outside of Canada [5]. Immigrant youth access mental health services at lower rates than their Canadian-born peers and are more likely to seek care through emergency departments during crises, often due to barriers such as lack of a primary care provider [6, 7].

New immigrant children, youth, and families face additional barriers to healthcare access, including poverty, language difficulties, being unaware of services, transportation concerns, cultural stigma, discrimination, isolation, and mistrust of authorities [8].

Culturally Informed Digital Technology Practices

When supporting children, youth, and families experiencing problematic use of digital technology, it is important to create a non-judgmental space that allows for differing cultural perceptions of technology. The following are examples of cultural considerations and practice guidelines:

- Consider that your client may come from a culture that does not think of technology use as positive
- Provide access to interpreters
- Assess any generational or cultural divide regarding technology between the youth and their caregivers
- Consider religious beliefs and how they impact on family dynamics
- Consider that exposure to pornography, violence, and even the way characters in games are dressed can conflict with certain cultural values
- Consider personal definitions of problematic use in relation to cultural values. Digital technology may interfere with a value or practice surrounding family time
- Be aware of personal reactions, biases, values, perceptions, and potential prejudices you have as a care provider, as they may impact how you support a family
- Educational opportunities and a lifelong commitment to culturally competent practices support service providers in developing skills to advocate on behalf of children, youth, and families who may be experiencing issues with digital technology [2, 5, 8].

Refugee Youth

Refugee youth in Canada face significant barriers to mental health services, leading to lower utilization rates. Effective approaches to addressing their mental health concerns include:

- Facilitating cultural integration and a sense of belonging.
- Utilizing cultural brokers.
- Bridging to settlement services.
- Supportive counselling.
- Providing supportive counseling and facilitating referrals to mental health practitioners.
- Educating about mental health and addiction.
- Offering contextual information to help navigate available resources [8, 9].

2SLGBTQI+ Youth

2SLGBTQI+ is an acronym representing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or questioning), intersex, and 2 spirit Indigenous people. The plus sign indicates inclusivity of all sexual and gender diverse identities [10].

Many 2SLGBTQI+ individuals experience unmet healthcare needs and may avoid seeking services due to real or perceived discrimination [11].

Children and youth who are questioning their sexuality or gender, or identify as 2SLGBTQI+, may not have support from their families, peers, schools, communities or even their governments. Even in the most progressive societies, they may be concerned for their personal

and emotional safety, which could be a barrier to accessing treatment. Overall, they may fear for their safety, fear discrimination and judgment, have internal conflict, and a non-supportive home or social environment. These factors contribute to depression, suicide, anxiety, and addiction. 2SLGBTQI+individuals often use digital technology to find information and connect with people in a supportive environment that may not be easy or safe to access in their community. Currently, a gap exists in healthcare resources specific to the needs of the 2SLGBTQI+community [12].

Although the internet may provide a viable solution for this gap, online information is not always credible and can be inaccurate or inadequate. For example, a youth who identifies as transgender does not need the same sexual health resources as a straight cisgender peer. Transgender youth may access pornography sites for transgender sexual education not available elsewhere, to satisfy curiosity and to see sexual images. Although this may not be a negative experience, it can be difficult to control content [12].

Creating a Supportive Environment

Evidence-informed treatment for the problematic use of digital technology includes providing a safe place, non-judgmental interactions, appropriate addiction and mental health screening, and applicable interventions [10]. As a service provider, you can work towards providing a safe and supportive environment for 2SLGBTQI+ youth and their families by:

- Creating a welcoming environment by placing 2SLGBTQI+transgender flags in a visible place
- Introducing yourself by including your pronouns. This shows that you are respectful of different self-identity expressions. For example: “Hello, my name is Jane. I use the pronouns he/him/his”
- Creating inclusive intake forms and paperwork. Forms can include check boxes for preferred pronouns, an “other” box for gender, and use language such as partner/spouse or parent as opposed to mother or father
- Advocating for gender-neutral bathrooms
- Providing diverse and inclusive reading materials in waiting areas
- Reflecting on your internal biases or personal perceptions of the 2SLGBTQI+community and discuss them with someone you trust
- Staying informed by search for resources. For example, AHS has a page on its website with content specific to 2SLGBTQI+/Sexual and Gender Diversity: https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/page15590.aspx

By adopting culturally informed approaches, service providers can better support diverse populations in navigating digital technology challenges while ensuring equitable access to mental health services.

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