

# Culture, Language & *pain*

- Perspectives from a CaLD lens

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Under the stewardship of Mary Aikenhead Ministries

“So, here you are  
too foreign for home  
too foreign for here.  
Never enough for both.”

Ijeoma Umebinyuo  
*Questions for Ada* (2015)

*Songs of Wisdom* by  
Boman Ali Wakilzada





# Pain & culture

neurological or physiological  
experience

+

socially learned behaviors and  
attitudes within cultures

Mark Zborowski  
People in Pain  
(1969)

PEOPLE  
IN  
PAIN

Mark Zborowski



# Acute Pain Management: Scientific Evidence

FIFTH EDITION 2020

Schug SA, Palmer GM, Scott DA, Alcock M, Halliwell R, Mott JF; APM:SE Working Group of the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists and Faculty of Pain Medicine **(2020), Acute Pain Management: Scientific Evidence (5th edition)**, ANZCA & FPM, Melbourne

Edited by:



# Pain - beliefs

- ...God's will
- ...punishment
- ...bewitching
- ...external
- ...part of ageing
- ...seek care reactively
- ...Acculturation?

Givler et al 2023; Reis et al 2022; Meints et al 2019



*The inside story* by Boman Ali Wakilzada

# Pain - perception

A person's empathy and ability to perceive pain in the other differs across cultures ...

Rosa 2018; Atkins et al. 2016

Racial and ethnic differences influence analgesia prescription, perceived pain tolerance and threshold.

Givler et al 2023; Clarke et al 2022; Meints et al 2019;  
Groenewald et al. 2018; Kim et al. 2017; Aufiero et al. 2017;  
Konstantatos 2012





# Pain - perception

...Chinese patients required less opioid but ...their pain scores were higher.

Konstantatos 2012



# Pain - perception

“...she was tapping her knees constantly and calling out in her language....I thought she was in pain so I gave her Panadol. Turns out she was cold and wanted a blanket!”

Nurse in aged care residential facility, SVHM

2018





# Pain – seeking help

...in a number of **collectivist/high power distance** cultures the concept of patient autonomy is foreign and **interdependence** is preferred, which results in patients **waiting** for a health professional to offer pain relief as the latter is seen as the primary medical decision maker...

Martin and Barkley 2017; Pillay et al.2014



# Pain – seeking help

...a young Vietnamese woman did not ask for pain relief because she felt **it was an imposition to ask a doctor to do something for her and that her doctor may have been unhappy with her request...**

Stewart and Do, 2003





# Pain - coping

**Stoicism** – valuing strength, a no-nonsense approach

**Spiritual coping, fatalism** - suffering is punishment, karma building and relief happens through **prayer** and **hope**.

**Emotive reaction** - responding to an event with tempered emotional release

**“Catastrophising”** - usually verbal, varying tonality, volume (related to locus of control).

Reis et al 2022; Xu et al. 2018; Meints et al. 2019;  
Cagle and Bunting 2017;



# Pain - coping

“agitation and calling out  
behaviour...”













## ...and what about Unconscious / Implicit bias?

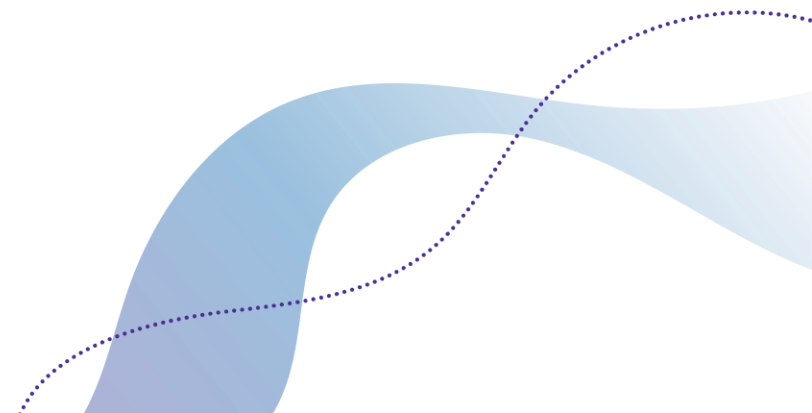
“Currently, many emergency medical service **training manikins** have **‘white’ skin**, which means students may not have opportunities to treat non-white patients”

Lord and Khalsa 2019

“...tragically the individuals who experience the **greatest burden** from pain are the same individuals who are **underrepresented in studies** that seek to understand and alleviate pain”

Palermo et al 2023







# Promoting cultural inclusion and safety

Be aware of preferred forms of address, pronunciation of names

Always make sure to use an **interpreter**

Use **translation** of screening and assessment tools only as support – not main assessment

**Combine tools** with reports from patient/family

Engage in **respectful** communication

*Make no assumptions* - address **unconscious bias**

Inform yourself, **be curious**

Ask **open ended** questions

**Modify language** if needed -*no slang, separate questions*

Build **relationship/trust**

**Listen** actively

Be aware of **non-verbal cues**

**Chunk and check**

Recognise, reframe, **reconcile**

Recognise, accept and **celebrate** diversity



# CaLD Resources



Talk to Me app



CALD Assist app



Cultural Atlas (SBS)



Centre for Cultural  
Diversity in Ageing



Centre for Ethnicity &  
Health



Victorian Transcultural  
Mental Health

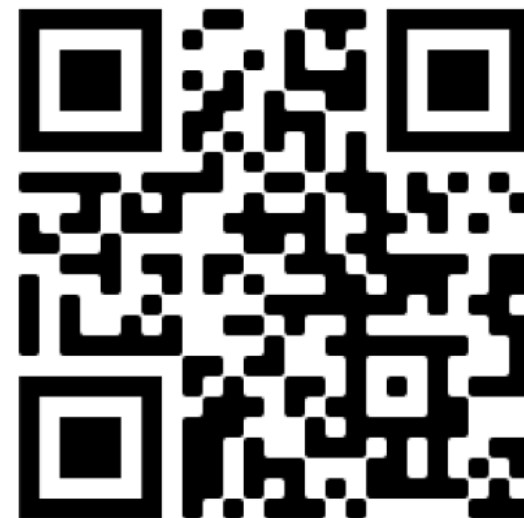


Victorian Multicultural  
Commission



Health Translations





<https://talktome.svhm.org.au>

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Under the stewardship of Mary Aikenhead Ministries

Thank you

Gracias  
Dank u wel  
Merci  
شكراً  
Ευχαριστώ  
አሙረላይ  
Terima kasih  
謝謝  
Grazie  
Obrigado  
ممنونم