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Using the culturally sensitive Kawa model with chronic pain clients

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Introduction:

The Kawa model (1) was developed in Japan to overcome cultural problems associated with models developed in western cultures. Chronic pain is a complex condition affecting performance of activities and limiting participation in all areas of life. Many clients suffer a long history of unsuccessful medical interventions, with the result that they become unable to express their feelings adequately. The metaphor of a river (Kawa) is understood in many cultures and is familiar to almost everyone.

Objective:

To describe how this model is used with clients, especially where there is a cultural and/or language barrier.

Description:

A project using the Kawa model as an assessment tool for clients with chronic pain shows that this is an easy to use, inexpensive method giving good results and requiring very little time in relation to the amount of information learned.

Results:

The results of this project show that it can lower communication barriers. In the discussion both advantages and disadvantages to using the model show that it provides a suitable approach for this client group. Age and the cultural background of the clients play a role in the acceptance of the Kawa model.

Conclusion and contribution to evidence based occupational therapy:

At present there is little evidence of the usefulness of this approach but the Kawa model is being shown to be a very suitable tool in occupational therapy (2) and this project contributes to the knowledge base.

(1) Iwama M. (2006) The Kawa Model. Churchill Livingstone; Edinburgh

(2) <http://www.kawamodel.com/>