

The cultural perspective of therapeutic relationship - a viewpoint from Africa

J. S. Neki B. Joinet M. Hogan J. G. Hauli G. Kilonzo

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ABSTRACT Therapeutic relationship has been considered an important ingredient of all psychotherapies. In communities in which no familiar conventions of such a relationship are available, the therapeutic encounter poses very different problems from those in the West, where such conventions freely prevail. This study has been carried out by five therapists representing three widely disparate cultures, but all working together in Tanzania. It brings together their perceptions of these problems and the strategies they employed to resolve them while working with African patients. In their view, in spite of great disparity between the world view behind Western psychotherapy and that of African communities, it is not impossible to forge a therapeutic relationship if empathic understanding and cultural sensitivity are added to the attitude of acceptance. After all, the therapist must attract and keep the patient before he can expect anything from him. The authors describe how this can be done with African patients.