

**The Strengths of Families  
of Color: Implications  
for Practice**

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# **Introduction**

- **Cultural Strengths**
- **Alternative Family Structures**
- **Diverse Child-Rearing Patterns**
- **Flexible Family Roles**
- **Functions of Extended Families**
- **Examples of Cultural Insensitivity**
- **Examples of Cultural Competence**

# **Cultural Strengths**

- **Centrality and Safety of Children**
- **Mutual Support and Connectedness**
- **Priority of Group over the Individual**
- **Diverse Family Structures and Roles**
- **Importance of Function Over Structure**
- **High Regard for Elderly and Ancestors**
- **Strong Spiritual Orientation**

# **Alternative Family Structures**

- **Members Within Same Households**
- **Members of Connected Households**
- **Extended Family Networks**
- **Godparents and Other Fictive Kin**
- **Female-Headed Single-Parent Families**
- **Male-Headed Single-Parent Families**

# **Diverse Child-Rearing Patterns**

- **Racial and Ethnic Identity**
- **Bicultural Socialization**
- **Surrogate Parenting**
- **Informal Adoption**
- **Formal Adoption**
- **Stability of Children**
- **Kinship Foster Care**

# **Informal Adoption Patterns**

- **Adoption agencies targeted 2-parents, middle-income, young and no children**
- **Informal adoptive families are 1-parent, low-income, older and have children**
- **800,000 black children not living with parents are informally reared by kin.**
- **200,000 are in the foster care system**

# **Flexible Family Roles**

- **Resilience of Single-Parent Families**
- **High Academic Aspirations for Children**
- **Older Children Raising Younger Siblings**
- **Black—Older Brother or Sister**
- **Hispanic--Older Sister**
- **Single-Parent Families Headed by Men**
- **Support from Paternal Relatives**

# **Functions of Extended Families**

- **Strong Bonds Between Households**
- **Mutual Tangible and Emotional Support**
- **Child Care, Respite Care, Housing**
- **Family Preservation and Reunification**
- **Ensuring Cultural Permanency**
- **Ensuring Safety of Children**
- **Godparents and Standby Guardians**

# **Role Confusion in Extended Families**

- **Too Flexible Family Roles**
- **Over-Burdened Grandparents**
- **Young Non-Evolved Grandmothers**
- **Three-Generational Households**
- **Excessive Role of Parental Children**
- **Too Intrusive Noncustodial Parents**

# **Examples of Cultural Insensitivity**

**Minorities abuse children more than whites**

**Minorities are not interested in adoption**

**Drug addicts physically abuse their children**

**Minority fathers are “deadbeat dads”**

**The apples do not fall far from the tree**

**Kin are too old/poor to care for children**

**Kin care is not as permanent as adoption**

# **Examples of Cultural Competence**

- **Assessing Assets & Capacities of Clients**
- **Identifying Cultural Strengths of Clients**
- **Locating Surrogate Parents**
- **Godparents and Successor Guardians**
- **Locating and Assessing Role of Fathers**
- **Exploring Resources of Father's Kin**
- **Identifying Resources in the Community**

# **Conclusions**

**More Culturally Sensitive Strategies**

**Assessing Both Risks and Assets**

**More Emphasis on Family Preservation**

**Greater Use of Extended Families**

**More Family Conferences**

**Planning for Successor Guardians**

**More Family-Strengthening Practices**