

CASE STORIES LEARNING RESOURCES

The case stories that you will read and hear are based upon interviews with dying migrants to the UK and health and social care professionals. The stories are of varying lengths, some are a composite drawn from different interviews, and others are based upon one person. The three longer case stories are also available as audio-files.

Social pain what it is?

There are three main disciplines and bodies of literature that are relevant in introducing the idea of social pain. Each approach understands social pain in a slightly different but complimentary way.

The palliative care and neuroscience approaches share a concern with the harm done to a person's relationships and social value. The social and human sciences also include an explicit regard for the suffering that results from social inequalities and injustice.

The stories have been designed to be used with the Case Stories website case-stories.org

The website includes interview podcasts with care professionals, researchers and writers on various aspects of stories, migration and end of life care. For example, the site provides information on 'Narrative Medicine', the approach to teaching and learning that the stories are based upon.

The website also has poems, art and links to relevant research, films and on-line resources. These resources can be used to introduce students to topics before an event, as part of teaching and also to support longer-term learning.

Approaches to Social Pain

- **Palliative Care** – the distress resulting from the loss of social relationships and worries about them, including financial concerns (Saunders and Baines 1989)
- **Neuroscience** – “the unpleasant experience that is associated with actual or potential damage to one's sense of social connection or social value (owing to social rejection, exclusion, negative social evaluation or loss)” (Eisenberger 2012)
- **Social and human sciences** – “the whole assemblage of human problems that result from what political, economic, and institutional power does to people” (Kleinman, Veena, and Lock 1997)

The difficulties in identifying social pain

References:

Eisenberger, Naomi I. *The Pain of Social Disconnection: Examining the Shared Neural Underpinnings of Physical and Social Pain*. Nature Reviews Neuroscience 13, no. 6 (June 2012): 421–434.

Kleinman, Arthur, Das, Veena and Lock, Margaret *Social Suffering*. University of California Press, 1997.

Saunders, Cicely and Mary Baines. *Living with Dying: The Management of Terminal Disease*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Neuroscience has found ways to identify and map social pain within the brain. In real-life situations, outside the laboratory, it can be difficult to ascertain what social pain is and what it means for an individual. There is also uncertainty about how advancing disease and cultural and language differences interact with and affect how social pain is experienced and expressed.

Because of the difficulties in identifying and responding to social pain, it is important to help learners to think about and explore how they can work with uncertainty and ambiguity.

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Supported by the British Academy

Continued overleaf

CASE STORIES LEARNING RESOURCES cont.

Difficulties in identifying social pain

Suggested learning outcomes

The following learning outcomes are ranked. Those at the beginning of the list can be used for introductory teaching and training and those towards the middle and the end can be used for intermediate and more advanced levels.

At the end of the learning event, participants should be able to:

- identify the three approaches to social pain
- use the approaches to give examples of what social pain is
- show understanding of the difficulties in identifying social pain
- show awareness of how social pain can be experienced by migrants at the end of their lives
- identify different therapeutic approaches that could be used to respond to and/or alleviate social pain
- demonstrate an understanding of how social pain can affect the experience of loved ones and professionals

- **Inadequate language** – we lack the language to name experiences of social pain such as the hurt and suffering caused by social exclusion or racism. This means that social pain can be expressed indirectly through metaphors, in dreams or hallucinations, in art, music or physical symptoms
- **Unconscious pain** – the findings of neuroscience research suggest that pain can build up in the body and that stress and trauma can be transmitted unconsciously from one generation to another so that someone might be distressed but is unaware of what is causing their suffering (Yehuda, Halligan, and Bierer 2002)
- **Pain in the past effects the present** – Related to the unconscious aspects of social pain is how painful experiences in the past can affect pain in the present

Suggestions for using the case-stories

• Thinking by yourself

Make notes on

- how social pain is expressed in a story and what it might relate to
- the relationships between physical and social pain
- similar experiences that you have come across
- how you might respond to the situation

• Talking with others

In small groups or pairs

- if you are using the written stories ask one person to read the story out
- discuss the different ways in which social pain is expressed in the story and what it might relate to
- talk about how you would each approach the situation
- share your own experiences of caring for people with social pain

Writing

- write a story about social pain at times of illness or at the end of life
- if you are working in a group, you can take it in turns to read out your stories and discuss them
- choose a case-story, read it out, leaving out the final paragraph/s and write a different ending to the story