Basic Anti-Oppression Theory

Closed System of Oppression Pyramid Benefits and Facilitation Options

Benefits:
The Closed System of Oppression diagram provides a sociological theory on why oppression exists, the roles that people have in a system of oppression and the resulting effects on people who participate.

Time Required: 15 minutes

Ideal Group Size: Any

Support Materials: Closed System of Oppression Diagram

Key Instructions: The trainer can either pass out the diagram and use it for discussion or begin to draw the diagram on the board and lead a discussion as follows:

1. Draw a large pyramid on the board or flip chart.
2. Separate it into three sections (as in the diagram).
3. Write “People on the Bottom,” “People in the Middle,” and “People on the Top” in each appropriate section.
4. Ask participants to describe people in each section, using characteristics that show their “place” in society. For example, people in the bottom may be described as homeless, addicted to drugs, poor, mentally ill, etc.
5. Once the diagram is filled in by participants’ comments, review the points on the diagram handout.

Key Points:
- Closed systems are structured hierarchically
- Assumes there is “not enough to go around”
- People at the bottom internalize the thinking and action of those at the top.
- People at the bottom experience:
  - Despair
  - Self-hatred
  - Horizontal hostility
  - Self-trivialization
  - Misplaced compassion
  - Need for approval from the top
  - Silence