

# Asian Americans— Mental Health Care— Reducing Stigma and Discrimination

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## Disparities in Mental Health Care for Racial and Ethnic Minorities

- \* Minorities have less access to and availability of mental health services
- \* Minorities are less likely to receive needed mental health services
- \* Minorities in treatment often receive a poorer quality of mental health care
- \* Minorities are underrepresented in mental health research

## ASIAN AMERICANS AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS

- Fastest growing racial and ethnic group in US.
- 6.1% of US Population (approximately 20 million people)— 15% (around 3 million) reported having a mental illness within the past year
- Over 60% of AA/PI are foreign born
- 43 different ethnic groups
- Over 100 different languages and dialects
- 54% live in West, 17% in the South, 18% in the Northwest, and 11% in the Midwest
- 45% age 25 or older have college or professional degrees (28% of whites) but almost two-thirds of Cambodians, Hmong and Laotians have not completed high school
- Asian Americans are the least likely of all demographics to seek mental health services but experience some of the highest rates of suicide and depression. They are three times less likely to seek mental health services than other Americans.

# CULTURE CONFLICT

- Asian Values

- Diligence
- Obedience
- Harmony

- Western Values

- Independence, individuality
- Natural Talents
- Pursuit of individual fulfillment and happiness

## Traditional beliefs and behaviors relating to mental health

<b>Culture</b>	<b>Beliefs</b>	<b>Coping behaviors and treatments</b>
Chinese	Mental illness caused by lack of harmony of emotions or by evil spirits. Mental health disorders are stigmatized as psychosis. Often try traditional herbs and acupuncture first; healers may be used concurrently to get rid of evil spirits	
Japanese	Mental illness caused by evil spirits; often thought not to be real illness.	Delay or avoid seeking professional help; many will use traditional sources of care
Korean	Mental illness caused by disruption of harmony within individual or by ancestral spirit coming back to haunt patient because of past bad behavior; result of bad luck or misfortune; payback for something done wrong in the past; is considered shameful. May deny problems, resulting in helplessness and depression; not likely to reveal the problem unless asked; may show signs through nonverbal communication and posture; may use shamanism.	
Vietnamese	Depression is sadness	Not readily acknowledged because of stigma; usually try home remedies, spiritual consultations, or Chinese herbs before seeking Western medical care; some use of exorcists; seek help only when problems become acute or obvious; family members try to cheer up or distract the patient

# Why is there a stigma??

- Fear of Disability: The association of disability is largest obstacle to accessing mental health services
- Taboos: Talking about mental health is taboo in many Asian Cultures, perpetuating the idea that mental illness is shameful and that people should keep these issues private (at home and within the family)
- Lack of mental health education: A lack of mental health awareness, coupled with negative stereotypes, may cause Asian Americans to overlook, reject, deny, or ignore mental health symptoms. Lack of understanding about mental health. AAPIs, particularly first-generation immigrants, may not understand that mental health is part of a person's overall well-being and can be treated just like other medical concerns. As a result, many older AAPIs deny or neglect mental health issues, explain symptoms in physical terms rather than psychological ones, or rely on social networks for support rather than seek professional services.

# CULTURAL NORMS AND VALUES

- Shaming related to mental health is a cultural norm in some Asian American communities. It is about saving face and avoiding embarrassing your family.
- Many Asian Americans also have strong family obligations that center around traditional and cultural values. Ancient Asian philosophical traditions strongly identify someone's self-value with their ability to care for their family and community.
- These notions encourage the idea that people with mental illness, who may not live up to these stereotypes, obligations, and values, are failures, valueless, or have no identity or purpose.
- These negative ideas can also discourage people from seeking treatment to avoid shaming themselves, their family, or their community.
- Getting outside help may also conflict with the Asian American cultural value of interdependence, which stresses that family or community can meet all a person's needs. This value perpetuates the idea that people should not seek professional help when relying on their family or community.

# THE MODEL MINORITY MYTH

The model minority myth enforces the idea that all Asian Americans are fully-integrated, intelligent, industrious, and have overcome racial bias. This places pressure on those within this group to meet these standards or expectations.

The assumption that all AAPIs experience educational success and economic stability can place immense pressure on people to meet these societal and familial expectations, often at the cost of their mental well-being.

“I Must Be Successful And Cannot Show Signs Of Weakness.”

According to SAMHSA, AAPIs are less likely to reach out for help than other races and ethnic groups. This may be due to faith and religious beliefs, cultural values and language barriers, to name a few. Additionally, AAPIs are mistakenly thought to experience economic stability. This stereotype, known as the “model minority” myth, incorrectly assumes that all AAPIs are wealthy and highly educated. This, compounded with the family and/or cultural expectation to be a highly skilled professional, like a doctor, lawyer or engineer, can be overwhelming. It may lead you to feel you need to succeed, regardless of the toll it may take on you.

Furthermore, it encourages people to hide their historical influences and deny the fact that their life includes frustration, let-downs, setbacks, failures, pain, and loss that everyone experiences. Media portrayals often further encourage this stereotype by presenting one-dimensional, uncomplicated, and “universal” Asian American characters.



# Religious/Spiritual Beliefs

Several prevalent religions in Asian American countries promote the idea that mental illness:

is a sin or divine punishment. Suicide is viewed as a sin.

represents disrupted energy flow or an internal imbalance

stems from a lack of faith

can be cured with enough faith, prayer, or good behavior

# Generational experiences of hardships

Many first-generation AAPIs experienced trauma as immigrants or refugees adapting to life in a foreign land. As a result, younger generations often feel guilty about sharing their mental health struggles, fearing they may seem insignificant when compared with their parents' and grandparents' hardships.

“I’m Ungrateful For All I Have.”

Many AAPIs learn about past family sacrifices that led to a better life in America. Parents or grandparents might have emigrated to the U.S. in search of safety and opportunity. With this in mind, there is a belief among younger generations that their elders experienced far more challenging hardships. For example, many Southeast Asians, who may be refugees or asylum seekers, may have experienced trauma due to oppressive regimes or economic instability back home. With this in mind, AAPI teens and young adults might feel guilty sharing their mental health struggles knowing their relatives faced something “more” stressful just to survive.

# Working with Families/Parents

- \* Dispel the label and perception of being weak or crazy for having a psychiatric disorder
  - \* Letting Asian kids know they are not alone in their struggle to suffer silently
  - \* Normalizing the feeling that it is ok to seek help and that there is no shame in suffering
- \* Grades and academic success does not define who your kid is and who he/she will end up in life.

# Implications for Asian students

- \* Erroneous belief that all AAPI student achieve academic success
- \* Education is highly valued in many traditional Asian cultural groups
- \* Pressure to succeed can take a toll on Asian students emotional well-being, causing cases of anxiety, sense of hopelessness, depression and even suicide.
- \* Competition to get the highest rank, SAT scores, best colleges
- \* Competition and pressure to pursue certain lucrative careers: engineering, law, medicine
- \* Sense of pride for parents/families
- \* Watch for body language. May avoid eye contact. May give false impression that everything is fine.

# When to Seek Professional Help, Support & Consultation

- **Persistent** sadness, anxiety, anger, hopelessness, worthlessness, loss of interest in pleasurable activities, and/or feelings of being overwhelmed.
- **Significant** impairments or changes in functioning, such as sleep, getting out of bed, appetite, concentration, and/or hygiene.
- **Increased** impulsive, reckless or risky behaviors (substance abuse, self-injury, etc.)
- **Recurring** thoughts or expressions about death, dying and/or suicide

# Recommended Mindfulness Resources

## The Best Meditation Apps of 2019

The Mindfulness App | Headspace | Calm | buddhify | Sattva |  
Stop, Breathe & Think | Insight Timer | 10% Happier | Breethe | Omvana |  
Simple Habit | Meditation & Relaxation Pro

<https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/top-meditation-iphone-android-apps>

<https://student.korumindfulness.org/free-guided-meditations.html>

# Mindfulness Meditation

“  
If you are depressed,  
you are living in the past.  
If you are anxious, you are  
living in the future.  
If you are at peace,  
you are living in the present.”

- Lao Tzu



# Resources

## ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER RESOURCES ON THE EMM RESOURCE CENTER

Head over to the Each Mind Matters Resource Center ([EMMresourcecenter.org](http://EMMresourcecenter.org)) to find several resources for Asian and Pacific Islander communities, including curated collections for Lunar New Year and Asian Pacific Heritage Month.

## SSG MENTAL HEALTH ALLIANCE

SSG Mental Health Alliance is a public/private partnership of 6 mental health organizations that work together to provide an effective, culturally competent, community-based system of care as an alternative to the hospital-based system for Asian and Pacific Islander clients with severe mental illness in the Los Angeles area.

## PACIFIC ASIAN COUNSELING SERVICES

Pacific Asian Counseling Services provides mental health services for MediCal eligible children and adults in the greater Los Angeles area. They have significant cultural and linguistic expertise in serving refugee and immigrant API populations. They have brochures for their services in the following languages: Chinese, Khmer, Japanese, Korean, Samoan, Spanish, Tagalog, Vietnamese and English.

## NATIONAL ASIAN PACIFIC ISLANDER MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

The National Asian Pacific Islander Mental Health Association (NAAPIMHA) implements campaigns, provides interpreter trainings to providers in California and a few other states, and provides technical assistance to in-state agencies and organizations. With the support of NAPIMHA, the National Asian American Pacific Islander Empowerment Network is a California-based advocacy group that works to develop leadership from within the API community who have direct experience of mental health challenges. Their goal is to improve the service delivery system for API consumers.

## NATIONAL ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN FAMILIES AGAINST SUBSTANCE ABUSE

The website of the National Asian Pacific American Families Against Substance Abuse provides information about mental health, substance abuse and gambling. The site includes a locator for substance abuse and/or mental health agencies that serve Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

## NAMI API OUTREACH RESOURCE MANUAL

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) compiled an API Outreach Resource Manual that outlines strategies to improve mental health outreach and access to services for the API community. The manual provides information about API mental health as well as resources for organizations including model programs and best practices.