



Asian American Community Mental Health Fact Sheet

- ***Cultural differences influence the experience of mental illness and the reaction to its onset and treatment.***
 - The body and mind are more closely linked in many Asian cultures than in Western cultural philosophies. As such, the experience of mental illness and desired modes of treatment may differ with the Asian culture.
 - Asian Americans are more likely to be cognizant of physical symptoms associated with mental illness than with emotional symptoms. As such, they may initially seek medical care for a mental illness.
 - Due to cultural perceptions, Asian Americans may feel shame or embarrassment in experiencing a mental illness, and prefer not to seek care, for fear of shaming their family. In many Asian cultures, expression of one's feelings is an admission of weakness.
 - Health care is family-based in many Asian cultures and mental health care, when sought, may be approached with a similar expectation.
- ***Asian Americans require sensitivity when being prescribed medications as they may react differently to the medications than other cultures, in terms of side effects and toxicity.***
 - The majority of Asian Americans seek alternative modes of treatment for illnesses. Some alternative modes of care, such as herbal treatments, may interfere with prescription medications.
 - Genetic alterations may cause differences in the metabolization of prescription drugs. Specifically, many Asian Americans have a genetic alteration that decreases the metabolic rate of the IID6 isoenzyme - which is responsible for metabolizing tricyclic antidepressants and many antipsychotics.
 - Differences in body fat and diet may result in fluctuating responses to prescription medications.
- ***While mental illness is not always recognized and treatment is not always sought among Asian Americans, it is an alarming problem in many Asian communities.***
 - Many Asian Americans experienced severe trauma before emigrating to the US, or during the process of fleeing their homes.
 - Social anxiety, social phobias, depression and trauma-related disorders occur at high rates within the Asian American community.
 - Young Asian Americans have the highest suicide rate out of all racial and ethnic groups in the country. Adult suicide rates for the Asian American population are high as well.

- *Receiving treatment for a mental illness as an Asian American is challenging, but there are programs to help.*
 - Communication is challenging in that few mental health care providers are conversant in Asian languages. Additionally, many Asian languages do not contain distinct words to describe feelings linked with mental illness. For example, anxiety, insomnia and pain are all expressed with only one word in several Asian languages.
 - High rates of Asian Americans lack health insurance.
 - The stigma associated with mental illness is of particular concern in Asian communities due to cultural perception.
 - Despite these challenges, new programs are aiming to assist the Asian American community in overcoming barriers to mental health care. The Bridge program in New York has been successful in educating Asian communities about mental health care and offering communication tools to providers. 75 physicians have been trained in this program and mental health encounters by Asian American clinic patients has increased 300% since the program's conception. Many other cities are starting to replicate this program and create new one in order to reach out to the Asian American community.