

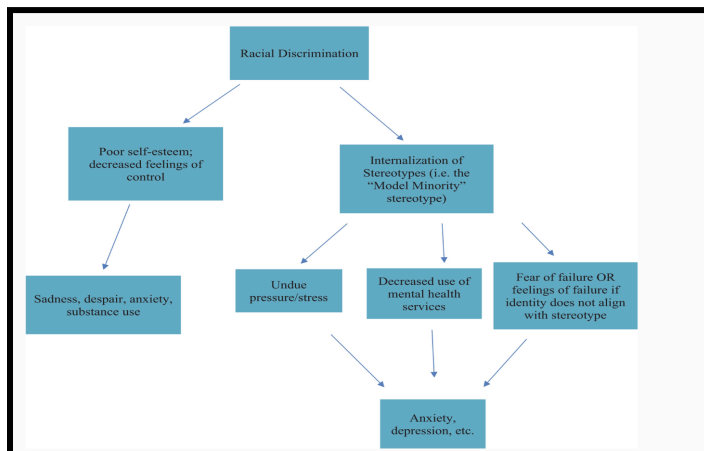
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Model Minority Mental Health Event
4/15/24

Introduction

Asian Americans often face stereotypes of the model minority from childhood to the workplace. We are often told to practice piano and go to Kumon instead of painting or building clay. According to PEW Research Center, 63% of Asian American people face examples of the model minority in everyday life, which puts us in places where we are constantly assumed to be good at math and science (Pew Research Center). This has adverse effects on mental health of Asian Americans, where our cultures and upbringing make us three times less likely to seek mental health services. Mental health is a facet of existence that affects every single person, not just Asian Americans, and leaving those mental health concerns can lead to devastating impacts, including depression, anxiety, and suicide. According to a survey of Korean students aged 18-29, negative mental health is connected to having to balance a traditionally Korean identity and an American one (Lee et. al.). Many 2nd and 3rd Asian American immigrant children struggle with not fitting into the white canon, but also not fully identifying with the Asian part of their ancestry, especially if they've never lived in Asia.

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This diagram explains how societal pressures (the Model Minority Myth and stressful situations) lead to mental health issues.



Source: Renehan, C., (2022) ““Model Minority” Mental Health: An Examination of the Barriers to Effective Care Among Young AAPIs”, Undergraduate Journal of Public Health 6. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3998/ujph.2317>

Cultural Stigmas

Asian American households often culturally operate under an “always respect your elders” mentality. We are expected to always listen to our parents, and our grandparents. Disagreeing with them is seen as an insult, on par with telling them to “shut up”. Many older Asian Americans do not share the same value of mental health that youth are starting to emphasize more and more. For a lot of Asian American adults, physical health is the only “real” health concern, and mental health is “fake”. When the culture demands that Asian youth listen to what their parents tell them, and those adults tell them that mental health is not a valid concern, those issues get swept under the rug. Additionally, Asian youth grapple with high parental expectations, expecting that they operate at 100% every single day. This, evidently, puts Asian

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children under immense pressure, feeling like an absolute failure if they don't get A's on every single test, or win every single debate tournament. According to Professor Gordon Nagayama Hall from the University of Oregon, "When Asian-Americans' academic performance or other achievements do not live up to the myth, they may struggle internally. Even if they personally perceive the model minority myth to be a myth, there may still be family or community pressure to live up to it." Therefore, what is needed to create a community of Asian American role models to demystify the myths and menaces of mental health.

Proposal

To educate Asian American adults, it is necessary to combine facts with real life experiences. Cala M. Renehan, a faculty at the University of Michigan, speaks about the idea of culturally competent care. Culturally competent care is when caregivers "understand each person's values, experiences and personal beliefs, and strive to provide services that support their goals and are aligned with their cultural values" (Renehan). Many adults do not even know what unhealthy signs of stress are, so including Asian American professionals in mental healthcare to educate adults about what burnout or overworking looks like, for example, with Asian American youth is crucial. Specific examples of culturally competent care are addressing how shame plays a role in suppressing mental health concerns and unpacking how filial piety creates unhealthy spaces where children don't feel comfortable speaking about their problems. For this reason, finding professionals who are Asian American and familiar with culturally competent care is of utmost importance.

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Furthermore, it is also crucial to include the lived experiences of Asian American youth in the Bay Area. The Bay Area is one of the most academically competitive regions in the country, which, combined with external pressure from extracurriculars, makes for stress-filled lives. Thus, including three to five students to share what support they would have liked to receive from their parents to reduce the heavy burden on their shoulders could provide helpful insight for parents. Parents can take inspiration, or gain new perspectives from youth that are going through high-pressure experiences. For example, my parents once told me that I had to win every single debate tournament I entered in order to get into college. Clearly, this is an arduous burden to put on a child, especially because I debate on the national circuit, against teams all over the country. Naturally, I was not very receptive to this advice, because it seemed akin to telling a basketball player to win every single game they played. Instead, I would have been more receptive to my parents simply telling me that I had to do my best each time, or make it to semifinals instead of winning each time. Student narratives give adults a glance into what their child may be thinking when they belittle negative mental health claims.

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