Vocalizing the Unspoken: Asian American Women and Girls Behavioral Health Needs

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Background Information

- Coro Center for Civic Leadership
- San Francisco Mental Health Education Funds, Inc.
- GABHS for Gals
  - Gender-Appropriate and Culturally Competent Behavioral Health Services for Women, Girls, and Families
Agencies and Services Interviewed

Interviewed 21 clinicians and directors at 12 different programs

- Asian American Recovery Services
  - ADAPT
  - Lee Woodward Counseling Center
- Chinatown Child Development Center
- Chinatown/North Beach Mental Health Services
- Community Youth Center
- Filipino Community Center
- Japanese Community Youth Council Asian Youth Prevention Service (AYPS)
- Richmond Area Multi-Services (RAMS)
  - Children, Youth, and Family Services - Wellness Center
  - Adult Outpatient and Prevention Services
- San Francisco General Hospital Psychiatric Inpatient 7B
- Sunset Mental Health Service Outpatient
- Vietnamese Youth Development Center
The Story of Mei
Agenda

- Demographics
- Pressures
- Behavioral Health Risks
- Needs
- Where Are We Now?
- Best Practices and Strengths
Demographics

- Chinese Immigrant
- Chinese American
- Vietnamese Immigrant/Refugee
- Vietnamese American
- Filipino Immigrant
- Filipino American
- Japanese American
- Cambodian Immigrant/Refugee

Immigrant or American Born?

- Types of pressures and stressors depend on the age the woman immigrated
  - Born here?
  - Younger than 8?
  - Between 9 and 18?
  - As an adult?
Cultural and Societal Pressures
Cultural and Societal Pressures

Voices from Agency Staff and Clinicians

- **On the Stigma**
  - “There’s a huge stigma. Chinese [people] think of mental health as being crazy and violent – they do not see depression as a mental health issue.”

- **On Taking 2\textsuperscript{nd} Place**
  - “Boys have always been a little bit more ‘treasured’ in Chinese culture – they are always like the little emperor – and are treated better than girls. So they took second place in the family.”
Behavioral Health Risks

- Lack of agency to communicate needs
- Psychosomatic presentation of behavioral health issues
- Pattern of binge alcohol and/or drug abuse
- Avoid seeking services
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Suicidal tendencies
“Oh my gosh, they’re such FOBS, I don’t want to hang out with them’, you know that’s how it is, you already see that divide. Even though [we both speak Chinese], I won’t [talk to him] because you either want to be more Americanized [and] you better stay that way, or if you are [more] Chinese, then you stick with that group.”
Asian Girls and Adolescent Needs

Behavioral Health Risk
* Anxiety  * Depression  * Low-Self-Esteem  * Cutting  * Risky Relationship Behaviors

Demographics  Pressures  Risks  Needs  Now?  Best Practices
Asian Women Needs

- Working the Double Shift
- Ability to Acculturate
- Role Reversal
  - Becoming the breadwinner
  - Becoming dependent on children
- Domestic Violence
- Issues of control and expectations
Unique Needs of Asian Ethnic Groups

- Filipina Women exploited by job demand and pressure from family

War Refugees: Cambodian and Vietnamese Women

“They don’t have the basic family structure because of war so you see a lot of family members who have particular stress and trauma.”

- Trauma
  - Dealing with death, war, and starting over

- Lack of support system
  - Forced to flee
Unique Need of Asian Ethnic Groups

- Japanese community – rejuvenating community cohesiveness
- Socioeconomic status of family
- Chinese rural parent and child conflict on definition of education
  - Staying home vs. Extra curricular activities
- “Escort Service” and materialistic behaviors in Immigrant Chinese girls
  - “I don’t have to do much, I just go with this guy and he’ll buy me a Coach bag and he’ll buy me an [expensive] necklace.”
Where are we now?

- Silence during interviews
- Need more conscious thought and effort on gender appropriate services
- More conscious thought on implementing culturally proficient services
- Need more funding
  - Many women and culture focused programs cut
Where are we now?

- Asian female body type stereotypes possibly leading to under-diagnosis of eating disorders
  - “I think [body image standards] are a lot stricter. Back in their own country they are supposed to be really thin.”

- School personnel assumptions about Asian female student population is barrier to providing services
  - “The schools are out of touch with what Asian girls are doing [on sexual activity and “escort service” trend] and assume those issues are only with other student populations...they do not have enough support for the API girls.”
Best Practices/Strengths

- Strong Women Role Model: Vietnamese culture celebrates women warriors
- Asian women more willing to breach this subject
- Education to overcome the stigma
- Proximity to Behavioral Health Services
  - Only 20% of Asians accessing community services
  - Wellness initiative increased number to 35%
Best Practices/Strengths

- One-on-one sessions paired with family therapy
  - "Our best practice is working with the family and bridging that [communication and culture] gap."

- Promoting bicultural in community
  - "Understanding there are different values and empowering children to support both perspectives."

- Meeting clients where they are
  - Community centers provide "hang out space"
  - "Building therapeutic alliance is very important and the first step in our treatment process."
Best Practices/Strengths

- Building Trust
- Normalizing their Experiences
- Cultural Proficiency: Informed Not Knowing
- Girls and Women Groups:
  - Filipina groups: Babae, Kapihan
  - Community Youth Center groups: YAWAV, SAVE
  - Lee Woodward Counseling Center
Thank you!

Questions?