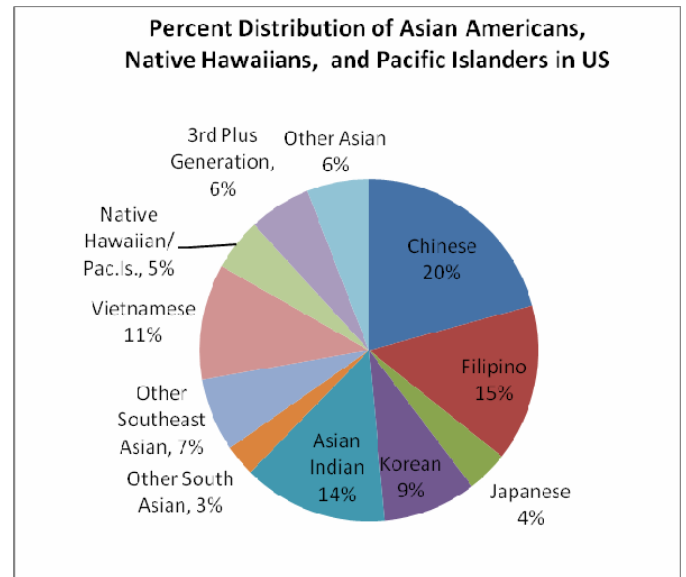




Mental Health Disparities: Asian Americans

Population

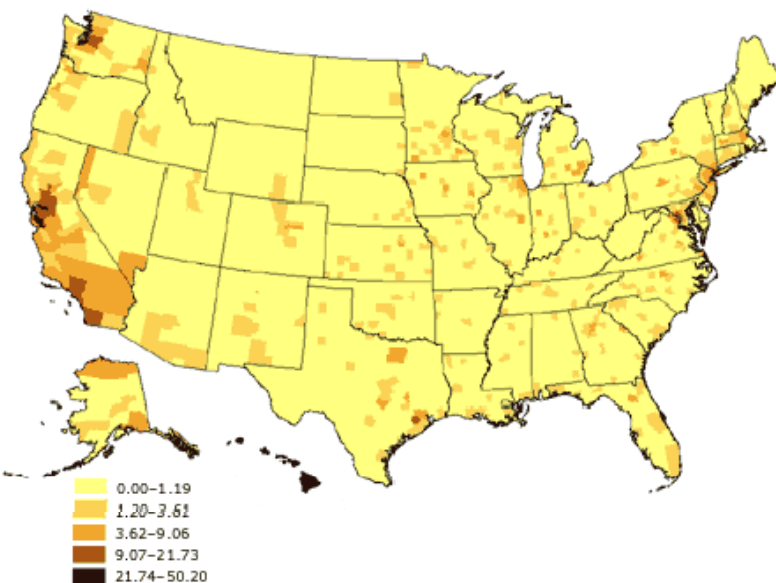
- Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders (AA/Pis) encompass some 50 subgroups with great diversity in terms of ethnicity, culture, English proficiency, religious traditions, histories, experience, and more than 100 languages. (1)
- Approximately 5% of the U.S. population – nearly 15 million people - identify themselves as Asian Americans or Pacific Islanders. (2)
- AA/Pis are the second fastest growing minority (after Hispanics). (2)
- More than two-thirds of Asians are US citizens (about 33% by birth, 37% by naturalization). (3)
- More than one-third of AA/Pis speak English “less than well” (4)
- Asian Americans overall are better educated, have higher household incomes, and lower poverty rates than whites. However, the opposite is true for Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders. (5 & 6)
- AA/Pis tend to be healthier than other racial and ethnic groups. Asian American women have the highest life expectancy (85.8 years) of any ethnic group in the US. (7)



Source: The Henry J Kaiser Family Foundation. 2008.

Note: 3rd Plus Generation includes individuals who reported their and their parents' country of birth as the US.

Percentage of Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders



Source: CDC/US Census 2000

Mental Health Status, Use of Services, and Disparities

- Overall prevalence rate of mental illness is similar or somewhat lower among Asian Americans than whites. Asian Americans are less likely to use mental health services than other populations and US-born Asians are more likely than foreign-born Asian Americans to seek help for mental health problems from medical care providers, mental health providers, or alternative medicine sources. (See Service Use chart.) (8 & 9)
- Asian Americans are much less likely than whites to report mental health problems to friends or relatives, psychiatrists or other mental health specialists, or to physicians. (9) Shame and stigma are believed to figure prominently in the lower utilization rates of AA/PI communities.

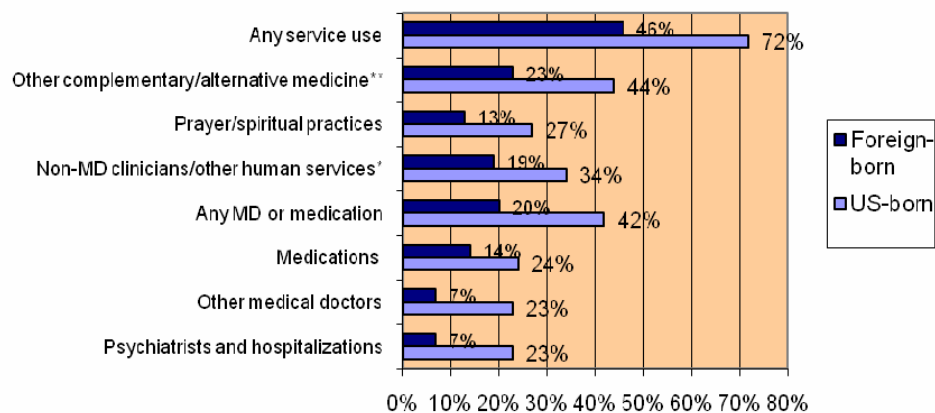
Percent Reporting Mental Health Problems

Report MH Problems to:	AA/Pis	Caucasians
Friend or relative	12%	25%
Mental health professional	4%	26%
Physician	2%	13%

Source: Zhang, A.Y., et al., 1998

- AA/PI's often consider expression of mental illness a personal weakness and are more likely than Westerners to express emotional distress through physical symptoms.
- The suicide rates of elderly Asian American women and young Asian American women (15-24 years old) are significantly higher than that of other women of the same ages. (10 & 11)
- Rates of substance use disorders and alcohol dependence are lower among Asian Americans, particularly women, than among the total US populations. (12)

Service Use for Mental Health Problems Asian Americans: Foreign-born and US-born



Source: Sribney, et al. (in Disparities in Psychiatric Care) 2010

* Including psychologists, counselors, other health professionals, religious/spiritual advisors, self-help groups, Internet support groups
 ** Including herbal therapy, homeopathy, big-dose vitamins, acupuncture, biofeedback, chiropractic exercise, massage, hypnosis, relation or meditation, etc.

- Many Asian Americans may seek traditional treatment (e.g., herbal medicine) before seeking help through Western medicine sources. (13)
- Among AA/PIs who use services, problems tend to be more severe, possibly because of delay in seeking treatment until symptoms are more severe. (14)
- Non-English speaking Asian Americans/PIs have significantly lower odds of receiving needed mental health services than Asian/PIs who speak only English. (15)
- Because of diversity among Asian Americans, there are many differences in mental health experiences and needs. For example, refugees from Southeast Asian countries are at greater risk for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of the trauma and terror preceding their immigration.

Need for MH Services and Receipt of Services By English Proficiency and Race/Ethnicity

	% need for MH care	% received needed services*
All	16%	45%
Asian/PI	9%	36%
English only	11%	56%
Bilingual	7%	33%
No English	12%	11%

*of those who reported a need for MH care
 Source: Sentell, T., et al. 2007

Barriers to Care

Key barriers to mental health treatment for Asian Americans, as for most people:

- Economic barriers
 - Lack of awareness about mental health issues and services
 - Stigma associated with mental illness
- Additional challenges include
- Continuing lack of accurate data, evaluation, and research on AA/PIs
 - Language and cultural barriers (culturally unresponsive services (lack of language match, lack of ethnic match, poor cross-cultural understanding) (16)
 - Lack of appropriate intervention strategies for diverse AA/PI populations (including integration of mental health and primary health care services)
 - Lack of involvement of AA/PI consumers and family members
 - Perceptions of mental illness as a weakness and source of shame/burden to family (cultural stigma) and different cultural norms about what constitutes appropriate mental health interventions

Responses/Strategies

- Conduct stigma awareness training with gatekeepers: primary care, community organizations, faith community
- Educate providers about Asian American mental health issues
- Improve language accessibility
- Increase awareness of mental health and chronic disease connection
- Increase presence of Asian Americans in research
- Advocate for policies that promote social justice, equity, and equality
- Comprehensive (including mental health and substance use disorders) affordable health coverage for all
- Focus on prevention, early intervention

Resources and References

Resources

Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum

www.apiahf.org.

Asian American Psychological Association www.aaponline.org

Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations
www.aapcho.org

Center for the Pacific Asian Family www.cpaf.info

Center for Multicultural Mental Health Research

www.multiculturalmentalhealth.org

National Asian Women's Health Organization

www.nawho.org

National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health

Association www.naapimha.org

National Asian Pacific American Families Against Substance

Abuse www.napafasa.org

National Asian Women's Health Organizations

www.nawho.org

National Library of Medicine

<http://asianamericanhealth.nlm.nih.gov/behissues.html>

NIH, MedlinePlus - Asian-American Health

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/asianamericanhealth.html

NICOS Chinese Health Coalition (San Francisco)

www.nicoschc.org

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