Working with Asian American Individuals, Couples, and Families

A Toolkit for Stakeholders
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Section 1:

Introduction and Vocabulary

The purpose of Resource Center toolkits is to provide safety-net stakeholders with effective tools for promoting and integrating healthy relationship education into their programs. The content of this toolkit focuses on implications for safety-net stakeholders and information that can be directly applied to stakeholders’ programs or agencies when working with Asian American individuals, couples, and families.

The United States’ population has become increasingly diverse, and the important and growing role of minorities cannot be overlooked. In 2015, approximately 20.9 million U.S. residents identified as Asian or mixed-Asian. Asian Americans are the second largest immigrant group, preceded by Latino-Americans, and are one of the fastest-growing groups in the United States. In fact, the U.S. Asian population grew 72 percent between 2000 and 2015, and Asian immigrants are estimated to be the largest foreign-born group by 2055. Therefore, safety-net service agencies should be focused on their capacity to serve this growing population, increasing their knowledge as appropriate.

Asian Americans are a heterogeneous group of many different countries of origin. This toolkit acknowledges the diversity of Asian American populations and provides targeted cultural information to assist safety-net service providers working with Asian Americans from dominant demographic groups currently residing in the United States. For the purpose of this toolkit, these dominant groups are categorized into three subgroups of Asia’s three geographic regions: (1) East Asia, (2) South Asia, and (3) Southeast Asia. Where applicable, sections of this toolkit highlight issues as they apply to immigrants within each region, in order to ensure unique cultural considerations among subgroups are captured. Commonalities across subgroups are discussed as appropriate.

1. East Asia includes China, Japan, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea, and Taiwan;
2. South Asia includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka; and
3. Southeast Asia is divided into two categories, Mainland and Maritime.
   a. Mainland Southeast Asia includes Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Vietnam, and West (Peninsular) Malaysia; and
   b. Maritime Southeast Asia includes Brunei, East Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Timor-Leste.
Within the three subgroups, this toolkit primarily addresses Asian immigrants from Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Myanmar (Burma), the Philippines, South Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam, as these are the immigrant groups U.S. service providers are most likely to encounter. As of 2015, the largest percentage of Asian Americans were of Chinese origin. The next two largest origin groups were Indian-origin and Filipinos, then those with origins in Vietnam, Korea, and Japan, as noted in Exhibit 1. Fewer immigrants are from Brunei, East or West Malaysia, Singapore, Mongolia, or Timor-Leste than other Asian countries.

Exhibit 1: Asian Americans by Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian-Asians</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipinos</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This toolkit is designed to help stakeholders acquire skills to be culturally responsive when serving Asian American individuals, couples, and families. Traditional Asian cultural values are discussed, along with how Asian Americans are changing in response to shifting contexts of the United States. When service providers set aside preconceived ideas and seek to learn more about a family’s cultural values and collective experiences, the family will be more receptive to the program’s message, an effective client-provider partnership based on mutual respect can be established, and the family will have an increased likelihood of success in reaching their goal of self-sufficiency.

Use this toolkit as a starting point and reference guide to:

- Better understand Asian culture and values;
- Better understand the impacts of immigration and acculturation on Asian families;
- Improve outreach, engagement, and support of Asian American clients; and
- Learn more about the importance of healthy relationship skills, as well as strategies for integrating healthy marriage and relationship skills into service delivery systems.
Terms and Definitions

Asian American: The term Asian Americans has collectively referred to Americans whose families originated in many different Asian countries within the three major regions of East, South, and Southeast Asia.

Acculturation: Acculturation refers to the process of one acquiring the cultural characteristics of the country he/she immigrates to. There are four types of acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization.

Economic migrants: Most immigrants obtain a visa based on family relationships or employment. They may be sponsored by a U.S. citizen relative, lawful permanent resident, or prospective employer. U.S. citizens can file an immigrant visa petition for spouse, child, parent, or sibling, while lawful permanent residents (green card holders) can only file for spouse or unmarried children. Employment-based immigration depends largely on the education and skills of the workers. They generally need to hold advanced degrees and have professional skills. U.S. laws limit the number of visas available by country each year. The conditions and details are constantly changing as well.

Refugees: Refugees are a protected class of immigrant. Refugees have been forced to flee their country because of persecution, war, or serious violence. They have a well-founded fear of persecution, which may be based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a social group. A denial of asylum from the country they seek protection from may have deadly consequences for the refugee families, because a return to their homeland is too dangerous. Refugees are defined and protected by international law. A small number of Asian families, primarily from Southeast or South Asia, might have come to the United States as refugees because of wars and persecutions.

Safety-net service providers: The term safety-net providers, also referred to as social service providers or human service providers, refers to government agencies and programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), child support services, child welfare, mental health, labor and workforce services, and Head Start, along with other stakeholders who provide community and family services, education, youth independent living, and Tribal services.
Section 2: 

Historical Context of Asian Immigration to the United States

Asians were among early immigrants to the United States and are a heterogeneous group that includes much more diversity than indicated by U.S. Census data. There are at least 26 countries of origin, representing a multitude of languages and cultural groups. The reasons each subgroup immigrate, and their current situations in the United States, can vary dramatically. Safety-net service providers working with this population should equip themselves with basic knowledge of each subculture’s values in order to best conceptualize and assess their needs, to build appropriate relationships, and to provide effective, culturally responsive services. The following section provides information on the history of Asian immigration to the United States and differences between established versus recently arrived immigrant and refugee experiences and needs.

Examining Passengers Aboard Ships, Vessel is the Shimyo Maru, Angel Island, California, 1931, Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration
Asian Immigration in the 19th and 20th Century

Asian immigration in the 19th and 20th century was primarily to work in railroad construction or as agricultural workers. Exhibit 2 describes the immigration patterns of Asian Americans during this timeframe, specifically the differences among Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Korean Americans, and Asian-Indians.

Exhibit 2: Immigration Patterns of Asian Americans (in the 19th and 20th Century)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese Americans</th>
<th>Japanese Americans</th>
<th>Filipino Americans</th>
<th>Korean Americans and Asian Indians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Americans immigrated in five waves over a 150-year period, starting in the 1850s, and make up the first significantly large Asian immigrant population of the U.S. They were initially welcomed by American capitalists who needed labor, but antagonism grew on the basis of racial and social discrimination. In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act barred Chinese admission to the U.S. and prohibited them from becoming naturalized citizens. Provisions of the Chinese Exclusion Act were not repealed until 1943.</td>
<td>As a result of fewer Chinese workers, a large number of young Japanese workers began arriving on the West Coast. By 1910, Japanese Americans exceeded the number of Chinese Americans. However, anti-Japanese sentiment grew and culminated during World War II, as Japanese-Americans were considered potential security threats to America. Families were forced into concentration camps, and many lost their homes, businesses, savings, personal belongings, and land. The population slowly recovered and grew after the war but still experienced residual racism and discrimination.</td>
<td>The U.S. acquired the Philippines as a territory in 1898, and this resulted in a large number of Filipinos who entered Hawaii to meet growing agricultural and service labor needs. In 1934, severe restrictions on reunification of immigrant families lowered the Filipino population in the U.S. by approximately 10 percent. After the Philippines became an independent nation in 1946 and the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act in the U.S., Filipinos began migrating to the U.S. to escape political hardships in their homeland and to seek better opportunities for employment.</td>
<td>As Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino populations continued to grow, a small number of Koreans began to move to Hawaii, and then the U.S. mainland, in the early 20th century. Some Koreans came to the U.S. as political exiles. Asian-Indians also entered the U.S. as low-paid laborers to fulfill the labor shortage and Chinese exclusion; recruited by railroad companies, a few thousand Sikh immigrants moved from the Punjabi region to Canada, and then to the Pacific Northwest and California.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Legislation Affecting Immigration

Asians have confronted exclusion and injustice in many immigration laws and policies, while a few have been more inclusive. Table 1 shows many laws executed in the 20th century that affected Asian immigrants’ and their families’ admission and citizenship in the United States.11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Legislation Affecting Asian American Immigration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gentlemen’s Agreement (1907)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Immigration Act (1917)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>U.S. Supreme Court Ruling (1923)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Origins Act (1924)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presidential Order (1942)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The War Brides Act (1945)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Immigration and Nationality Act (1965)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Immigration Act (1990)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Asian Immigration in the 21st Century

With the end of the Vietnam conflict in 1975, the communist takeover of Cambodia, also in 1975, and the spillover of these events into Laos, a large number of Southeast Asian refugees sought protection in the United States and other nations to escape persecution in their homeland. These refugees included Vietnamese, Chinese-Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, Hmong (a nomadic hill tribe living mostly in Laos), Mien, and a number of other groups. In the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, aid agencies in the United States and other Western nations resettled many thousands of refugees from these three nations, including different ethnic groups such as the Hmong. More recently, persecution of minority ethnic groups, such as Karen and Karenni in Myanmar (Burma), led to patterns of displacement and migration by both ethnic groups. Many fled to Thailand and have more recently resettled in the United States, with the largest influx of refugees occurring between 2006 and 2008.12

Primary Reasons for Immigration

Immigrants from South, East, and Southeast Asian countries have come to the United States for a number of reasons, including economic or educational opportunities, or people seeking refuge because of war, turmoil, or political and economic hardships. Since the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, the immigration pattern has changed to include more and more highly educated, financially secure, and English-speaking individuals.13 For example, among Asian individuals ages 25 and older, approximately 51 percent have at least a bachelor’s degree. This is a higher rate compared with 30.1 percent for all Americans.14 Other reasons for immigration include reunification with family, business opportunities, vocational training, and as a spouse of a U.S. service member.15

Immigrants who arrive as refugees initially struggle to establish themselves in the United States. They suffer distressing losses, separation, changes in health status, torture, or other forms of direct or secondary trauma caused by exposure to war, genocide, and political turmoil.16 This effect can be long-term and may be understood and expressed by families in different ways and to varying degrees. Refugees may not have acquired sufficient economic stability or language skills to access or fully utilize services. They may struggle to understand both spoken and written English. The forms and other documents associated with health care or other human services can overwhelm families with limited English communication skills, and it may take them longer to complete. For this reason, it is important that stakeholders seek understanding and exhibit patience.
SUGGESTED RESOURCES

• A guide developed by the Center for Advanced Studies at the University of Minnesota’s School of Social Work includes best practice tips for working with families with refugee backgrounds. This guide is specific to child welfare, but many concepts can be applied to other fields. View the guide at http://cascw.umn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/BestPractices.pdf.

• A helpful website in providing services to individuals with limited English proficiency is LEP.gov, a federal interagency website that provides forms, fact sheets, and information packets for social services, such as housing, transportation, and nutrition assistance in a variety of languages. For example, a resource titled “I Speak” can help service providers identify the primary language spoken by a client.

In contrast, those who immigrated for economic advantages, reunification with already-established family members, or as a spouse of a U.S. service member may have more rapidly achieved economic stability and acquired English language skills, thus smoothing the way for accessing and utilizing services and making application and documentation more routine.

It is important to note that immigrants commonly engage in a secondary migration once in the United States to be near other Asian families. Oftentimes, communities with large numbers of immigrants create ethnic enclaves that provide a type of mutual aid pattern of self-help commercial establishments, like food stores and restaurants that cater to the needs of particular ethnic groups of immigrant families. For example, entire tribes of Hmong families engaged in secondary migration so they would be near other Hmong tribes. This was important because Hmong practice cross-tribal marriage. From the initial secondary migration, Hmong have now grown into a large and far-reaching network of successful commercial farming entities in California and Minnesota.17
Table 2 describes the primary reasons for immigration for each region of Asia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>South Asia</th>
<th>East Asia</th>
<th>Southeast Asia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| During immigration in the 1800s and 1900s, South Asian immigrants were:  
• In the United States for low-paying, short-term employment;  
• Seeking refuge because of hardship in their homeland; or  
• Seeking better employment and educational opportunities. | • Many recent immigrants have good education backgrounds and hold positions in the fields of science and engineering. They acquire permanent resident visas through employment or family sponsorship.  
• Very few people in this population seek asylum to escape from political hardships.  
• Many parents believe in the American dream—that economic and academic success for themselves and their children is possible through hard work in the United States. | • The earliest immigrants from Vietnam were skilled and educated workers; however, as the communist takeover continued, many unskilled farm workers sought asylum through rescues associated with their journeys into the sea.  
• Immigrants from Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand were less influenced by war and turmoil, and came to the United States primarily in search of better employment and educational opportunities.  
• Similarly, immigrants from the Philippines sought economic opportunities, often in the health care industry. |
Understanding the Complexities of Asian Groups
Nations of Origin by Region and Ethnic Group

An individual’s nation of origin and their belonging to a particular ethnic group form the foundation for their identity. The geography of a nation influences the culture and lifestyle of its population. One result of the diversity of each of these nations is a great number of diverse ethnic groups, with religions, languages, governing bodies, and ways of life unique to each. Additionally, trade and colonization by other nations—both Eastern and Western—influenced life in home nations. Consequently, it is not uncommon to find immigrants who practice forms of traditional Eastern religions, such as Islam, Buddhism, or Hinduism, along with Western religions such as Protestantism or Catholicism. Furthermore, governing bodies of each nation influence immigrant families’ expectations and life patterns. For example, more restrictive governments can create fear or suspicion of service providers who, to the immigrant, are perceived as being a representative of a government organization.

Why Is This Important?

South Asian Americans consist of one of the fastest growing populations in the United States. There are more than three million Asian-Indian American residents, with more than 68 percent foreign-born. Even though some South Asian immigrants are fluent in English, their use of language can be different. The significance, prevalence, and implication for the same phrases may be slightly different in two cultures. Similarly, a safety-net stakeholder should understand cultural values and norms, family hierarchy and structure, social etiquette, and minority status of individuals of East Asian immigrants. For example, a provider who adopts mostly mainstream American culture may easily misunderstand an East Asian immigrant client who takes his/her mother’s opinion into account when choosing a career, a place to live, or a romantic partner, as being too dependent. Background knowledge is crucial when working with these cultural groups.

Further, understanding that different ethnic groups exist within each nation of origin is important because each immigrant ethnic group brings with them their own traditions that have been influenced by long-held beliefs and actions practiced in their home nations, and beliefs and actions encountered in new nations as part of their journeys toward resettlement in the United States. It is important that safety-net service providers recognize these influences that flow through and shape religion, language, and encounters with others outside one’s own ethnic group, along with social and cultural aspects of immigrants’ daily lives. Informed stakeholders are better at building rapport, assessing family dynamics, and most important of all, avoiding misunderstanding.
Table 3 shows the nations of origin by regions and ethnic groups.

### Table 3: Nations of Origin by Regions and Major Ethnic Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nation of Origin</th>
<th>South Asia</th>
<th>East Asia</th>
<th>Southeast Asia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>• Afghanistan • Bangladesh • Bhutan • India • Maldives • Nepal • Sri Lanka</td>
<td>• China • Japan • Mongolia • North Korea • South Korea • Taiwan</td>
<td>• Cambodia • Laos • Myanmar (Burma) • Thailand • Vietnam • West (Peninsular) Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian-Indian</td>
<td>• Afghanista Pashtun (Kuchis), Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Aimaq, Turkmen, and Baluch • Asian-Indian: Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Mongoloid/other • Bangladesh: Bengali • Bhutan: Nagalop and Sharchop • Nepal: Bahun, Chhetris, and Newars • Maldives: Dhivehis • Sri Lanka: Sinhalese</td>
<td>• China and Taiwan: Han Chinese • Japan: Japanese • Mongolia: Halh, Khalkha, or Mongols • North and South Korea: Korean</td>
<td>• Bouyei • Cham • Lao • Li • Miao/Hmong • Mon-Khmer • Shan • Tai • Tai-Kadai • Tai Dam • Thai • Vietnamese • Yao-Mien • Zhuang • Other people groups that are not classified within one of these categories are: Eurasian, Kristang, Lawi, Macanese, Pouhoy, Poumong, Poussang, Salo, Singmoon, Sino-Native, Tahang, Taket, and Tchaho</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Oftentimes, mainland nations also include significant coastal regions. Throughout this toolkit, we refer to Myanmar (Burma) using both names. The reason for this dual naming pattern is political. Refugees who have fled refer to their home nation by its more
traditional name, Burma, even though its more recently adopted name is Myanmar.\textsuperscript{23} It is important for stakeholders to recognize the political upheaval that exists even within the naming of a nation.

**Religions**

Generally speaking, religion plays an important role in Asian American’s lives, providing guidance toward individuals’ daily life and everyday routines such as diet, dress, and more, as well as their understanding and interpretation of significant life events and interpersonal relationships. In fact, 66 percent of Asian Americans said religion was very or somewhat important in their daily lives in 2014.\textsuperscript{24} Studies show that regular attendance at a religious organization helps to keep a stable mindset, maintain emotional control, and reduce depression for this population. Greater religious attendance is associated with lower rates of anxiety and depression as well as better well-being.\textsuperscript{25}

Asia has a diverse number of religions across the continent, including Buddhism, Catholicism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Sikhism, Taoism, and Zoroastrianism. Other groups include traditional, non-religious, and folk religion, or a combination of religions. Table 4 lists the primary religions by region in Asia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4: Major Religions by Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>South Asia</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Buddhism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hinduism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Jainism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sikhism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Zoroastrianism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a growing proportion of people who are non-religious, atheist, or humanist, or who practice other denominations.

Although some immigrants from Southeast Asia continue to practice Hinduism, Buddhism has largely replaced Hinduism as the dominant religion in Southeast Asia.

In East Asian and Southeast Asian countries, boundaries between several religions and cultural practices are sometimes blurred. For example, colonization by the United States, Great Britain, and France left a Christian impact on several Southeast Asian countries. Groups from those nations may blend Christian patterns of worship into their more traditional worship patterns. Even when it appears that a client is from a “single” religion, there may be complexity within their faith that isn’t apparent when described with a single term (such as being Buddhist).

Across South, East, and Southeast Asia, religious leaders such as priests, monks, imams, and yogis and their institutions are prominent in the lives of families. For some East Asian
Americans, religious, supernatural, or traditional healers are preferred when dealing with confusions in life. They believe that religious leaders have the knowledge and access to the spiritual world and are able to calm their spirits and soothe distress. Among South Asian countries of origin, it is important to note that consultation with religious or spiritual leaders is acceptable, but the concept of therapy remains controversial.

Buddhist monks attribute mental illness to a variety of causes, including daily stressors, mind-body imbalance, karma, virtuous deeds, and spiritual possession. In addition, deceased ancestors are often links to the spirit world and are worshipped at certain times of the year. It is worth noting that this practice is so entrenched in the culture that some would not refer to it as a “religious” belief. Instead, it is seen as a ritual to show appreciation and respect to the ancestors who gave birth and raised their offerings. When encountered with misfortunes or adversity, some would pray to the deceased ancestor as to a higher power.

For many Asian American immigrants, churches play an essential role in communities and provide spiritual, emotional, and social support. For example, approximately 71 percent of Korean Americans practice Christianity. They use churches as a means for socializing, determining political affiliation, and community advocating. Churches are one of the main anchors to Korean American networks and allow access to this ethnic group.

Information on the religious composition of Asians once in the United States is noted in Exhibit 3. Of Christian faiths, Catholicism was the most represented at 17 percent, followed by Evangelical Protestant at 11 percent. Of non-Christian faiths, Hindu was the most represented at 16 percent, followed by Buddhism and Muslim, both at 6 percent.

Exhibit 3: Asian American Religious Affiliations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Christian</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaffiliated</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Faiths</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Languages

Just as religions blend across boundaries, so can languages. Languages shift and change within and across nations and ethnic groups. Because of the fluidity of languages, an understanding of the different languages and dialects spoken by Asian immigrants is important for locating translators. Table 5 describes each language spoken by country in each region of origin.

Table 5: Major Languages by Region and Country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>South Asia</th>
<th>East Asia</th>
<th>Southeast Asia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan: Afghan Persian/Dari, Pashto, Turkic</td>
<td>• China: Mandarin and Cantonese</td>
<td>• Cambodia: (Islamic Group) Cham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh: Bangla</td>
<td>• Japan: Japanese</td>
<td>• Cambodia and Laos: Mon and Khmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan: Tibeto-Burman</td>
<td>• Mongolia: Mongolian</td>
<td>Myanmar (Burma): Burmese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India: Hindi is the most widely spoken language. There are 14 other official languages (Bengali, Telugu, Marathi, Tamil, Urdu, Gujarati, Malayalam, Kannada, Oriya, Punjabi, Assamese, Kashmiri, Sindhi, and Sanskrit). English is the subsidiary language for Asian-Indians.</td>
<td>• North and South Korea: Korean</td>
<td>• Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines: Tagalog and Ilocano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldives: Dhivehi and English</td>
<td>• Taiwan: Mandarin and Taiwanese</td>
<td>• Timor-Leste: Papuan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal: Nepali (other ethnic languages include Newari, Sherpa, Tamang, and Gurung)</td>
<td>• Vietnamese</td>
<td>Thailand and Laos: Tai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka: Sinhala</td>
<td></td>
<td>Vietnam: Vietnamese</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many dialects continue to exist in smaller groups within Southeast Asia. Although most Southeast Asian immigrants speak the dominant or “official” language of their home nation, it is important to inquire about the preferred language of one’s client.

While we often think of language as the spoken word, oftentimes body language is the stronger communication method when working with clients with diverse language comprehension. For example, Southeast Asian younger and more recent immigrants will initiate a palms-together under the chin greeting to an older individual, as will an older person who perceives the person they are greeting to be in a position higher than themselves. A smile and nod may indicate that the person is acknowledging the interaction but may not indicate agreement or even understanding. Service providers must remain vigilant to cues that signal limited understanding. These cues can include silence, nodding, answering in the affirmative without other appropriate action, or nervous laughter. Any combination of these cues can signal the need to probe for
understanding and/or agreement. A reluctance to meet the gaze of a person perceived as superior, including someone perceived as older, can mean that the immigrant may not be comfortable discussing the topic. Nevertheless, it is also possible for young immigrants to quickly adapt to a more Western and more casual form of greeting.

**Government or Ruling Bodies**

Government or ruling bodies in countries of origin have a strong impact on the ways families enter the United States. The relationship between the U.S. government and the immigrants’ home country plays an important role in the process of obtaining a temporary visa and permanent residency. Immigrants from countries with more restrictive governing bodies may have a strong reluctance to divulge any perceived weakness. This could influence immigrant families’ attitude and perception of U.S. government agencies and public services. Government turmoil or government inaction surrounding human rights are primary catalysts for refugees crossing regional borders. Knowing the status of governing bodies and current events in countries of origin can help stakeholders make informed decisions about a client’s needs. *Table 6 (see next page)* describes the types of government or ruling bodies by region of origin.

Many countries in South Asia have a history of colonial dominance, but democratic practices are weaker in some countries than others. For example, India has practiced democracy and is the most matured democracy, while Bangladesh and Pakistan have experienced military and civilian rule. In East Asia, approximately half the countries practice various forms of democracy, while China and North Korea are under communist rule. There are also political tensions between North and South Korea, as well as China and Taiwan, regarding the legitimacy of the current governances. In Southeast Asia, many nations have a blended form of government that combines constitutional monarchies with elected officials such as Cambodia and Malaysia, while Laos and Vietnam are under communist rule.
### Table 6: Government or Ruling Bodies by Region of Origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>South Asia</th>
<th>East Asia</th>
<th>Southeast Asia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>Presidential Islamic republic</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>Parliamentary republic</td>
<td>Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>Constitutional monarchy</td>
<td>Mongolia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Federal parliamentary republic</td>
<td>North Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>Presidential republic</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>Federal parliamentary republic</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Presidential republic</td>
<td>West (Peninsular) Malaysia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section 4: Cultural Considerations

Many cultural ideologies are engrained in the beliefs of this population, and can affect all aspects of life. The concepts of connectedness and collectivist ideologies exist across South, East, and Southeast Asia. It is also very important to respect authority and the elderly. In many Asian cultures, everything is relative and related, and one has no meaning without the other. While there are some similarities between ideologies in Asia and the United States, overall they contrast with the general American view of personal autonomy, materialism, and secularism. And while many Asian countries share similar ideologies, each part has slightly different concepts rooted in their worldview and way of life. In South Asia, there is a strong emphasis on wholeness and interconnectedness, implying that each element in the universe is seen as part of the divine. In Southeast Asia, the strongest influence on worldview is religion that focuses on collectivist ideas. East Asian’s worldviews are rooted in Confucianism and maintaining harmonious relationships. Taoism and the concepts of yin and yang provide explanations for life circumstances and practices for dealing with disagreements and negative emotions, and they are common principles in East Asia. This philosophy is based on the fact that opposition is only possible because of unity. While open expressions of strong affection and confrontation are generally discouraged in most East Asian cultures, this philosophy and the focus on togetherness helps individuals reframe their relationship.

Hierarchy, Family Structure, and Relationships

In most Western cultures, family often refers to the nuclear or immediate family. However, under the influence of collectivism, the definition of Asian family broadens to include the couple’s family of origin, both of their extended family members, and sometimes even longtime family friends. The language used to address a person demonstrates intent to
include the person in their family or as a way to show intimacy or hospitality. For example, in Chinese culture, one might address a mother’s friend as “Aunt Lee” or “Uncle Lee” instead of “Mrs. Lee” or “Mr. Lee,” despite not being blood related. Further, the family unit is highly valued and emphasized throughout the life cycle. This is reinforced by child-rearing practices, rituals, and customs such as family celebrations and meals, birth and death rites, the passing down of cultural stories, and the sacredness of genealogy records.

Hierarchy is evident in traditional gender roles that still persist to some extent across South, East, and Southeast Asian cultures—where the man assumes the role of leadership, authority, provider, and protector, while the woman adopts the role of homemaker and child bearer. Gender ideologies contribute to families’ interactions and expectations. Daughters may be raised taking care of their siblings and grandparents, while sons are conditioned to inherit the wealth of the family and to assume the financial responsibility for the family’s well-being. For example, for Hindus, the senior and male family members may have more authority in general matters and decision-making—and in a case of intimate partner violence, a “passive” wife in the Indian context may be less likely to report her husband. Safety-net service providers working with this population should be attuned to the power dynamics and interpersonal expectations embodied in the culture, especially as they relate to traditional gender roles.

Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education in Practice

The Cambodian Association of America (CAA) is a U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance, Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education Grantee that recognizes that many Asian-Pacific Islanders face cultural norms that define gender roles that undervalue women. These norms can lead to issues like depression, divorce, and a breakdown in family functioning. In response, they offer a Marriage Enrichment Program that includes training to enhance skills and knowledge on communication, anger management, conflict resolution, access to marriage resources, understanding cultural norms, and the relationship between cultural norms and a healthy marital partnership. To be culturally responsive, they also offer their training in Khmer, Lao, Thai, Vietnamese, Kmhmu, Hmong, Spanish, and Samoan. For more information, see: http://www.cambodianusa.com/marriage-enrichment-program.html.

Further, in some Asian cultures, the parent-child relationship is considered more important than the couple relationship. It is important for stakeholders to recognize the centrality...
of this relationship—if not, providers could misjudge a couple relationship as unhealthy and the structure of the family as abnormal. Additionally, the firstborn child, especially a son, may receive favoritism from their parents and other family members. This person might receive more attention from parents, more influence in family decisions, and monetary support, but they may also be expected to take on greater responsibility.

Multi- or intergenerational families are also common across South, East, and Southeast Asian households. In South Asian households, older parents may expect to live with their son and daughter-in-law. In East Asian culture, the concept of filial piety is paramount. This principle suggests a clear power structure in traditional East Asian American families, determined by birth order, age, and gender. Elders obtain the highest authority and are to be obeyed, revered, and cared for within families as part of the multigenerational family life cycle. Parents have the duty to guide and teach their children about social norms and righteous behaviors.49 Further, in Southeast Asian culture, it is common for elders from multiple families to engage in major decisions.

Filial piety (xiao) is a Chinese concept focusing on the importance of being loyal to, being respectful to, and taking care of one’s parents and other family elders.

Currently, in Japan, South Korea, China, and Taiwan, many families choose to continue the practice of an intergenerational lifestyle for cultural and economic reasons. Newly married or young couples co-reside or live within a close proximity of their parents, while many older parents provide assistance regarding child care, daily chores, and finance.50 This also prevails in immigrant Asian families and demonstrates mixed feelings from both generations. For East Asian immigrants, Chinese grandparents may experience significant loneliness, restrictions in their activity patterns, and social isolation while living in the United States with their adult children and grandchildren. Some have limited mobility because of language differences and lack of transportation. Similarly, for Southeast Asian immigrants, immigrant children tend to have greater ease in learning the new language and can, therefore,
navigate shopping, school issues, and the health care system more easily than their parents or grandparents. Older individuals may find that their “traditional” wisdom is no longer valued in the individualistic and fast pace of life in the United States. Furthermore, confusions of hierarchy and boundary may arise when grandparents and more Westernized adult children disagree, and each claims their power in decision-making. Nevertheless, some grandparents and adult children enjoy this intergenerational lifestyle and experience it as mutually beneficial. Grandparents help to pass down the values and norms of social order and play a fundamental role in family life as sources of wisdom and family identity.

It should be noted that in recent years, families in both Asia and the United States are transforming rapidly. There are more and more nuclear families as well as influences of Western values. Generally speaking, the family system has become less hierarchical, with greater open-mindedness in child-rearing. Further, more Asian American couples hold equal power in their relationships and make conjoint decisions about household assignments and child care responsibilities, especially those from modern Asian cities or those born in the United States. More Japanese married women seek outside employment to be able to afford the increasing living expenses for the whole family. Contemporary East Asian families are also shaped by changing economic, political, and sociocultural factors, such as the one-child policy (1980–2015) in China, economic depression and growth, and U.S. immigration policies, both in their countries of origin and in America. In general, there is more emphasis on individualism and self-autonomy.

**Employment and Education**

Pursuing and gaining education is seen to bring joy and pride to an Asian family and is therefore emphasized in a household. Acquiring an education means the entire family benefits from greater knowledge and wisdom, which in turn increases respect and reverence to the family (even more than to the individual). Second-generation Korean American, Chinese American, and Japanese American children are often reinforced to conform to this standard, and many parents are willing to sacrifice their own benefits to invest in their children’s education. Once in the United States, Asian parents may reflect their own aspirations of greater education and high-paying employment onto their children, creating pressure to be successful. Therefore, many children will pursue fields in science and technology because of the esteem that comes from these fields. Having a high-paying job also brings a good name to the family, which is a value instilled in children early on. Jobs and school become a family affair just as much as they are the child’s own affair. However, some children may face ethnic prejudice that could be a source of hindrance to success in work and education—an important obstacle for safety-net service providers to recognize.
Immigrant families whose education or professional qualifications are not approved by U.S., national, or state agencies may establish themselves in small businesses that require long working hours (e.g., dry cleaners), as a stepping stone back into the middle class.

As mentioned above, as immigrant families adjust to life in the United States, they tend to adopt mainstream U.S. patterns associated with gender equality. Many young women desire advanced educational opportunities, and some young men may prefer to directly enter the wage labor force without additional education. In addition, there can be significant challenges for first-generation immigrant students desiring entrance into colleges. With no one else to guide them, stakeholders can be the first point of entry into navigating the entrance exams, applications, choices of majors, and other steps needed to begin the immigrant students’ journeys into higher education.\(^5\) It can be especially important for stakeholders engaging students from refugee families who, oftentimes, do not have networks of others to guide the way toward a college degree.

Exhibit 4 shows statistics related to education and occupations of Asian Americans in 2015. Overall, 22.3 percent of Asian Americans (alone) had a graduate or professional degree, compared to 11.2 percent for all Americans 25 and older in 2015. Slightly more than half of the Asian American population worked in management, business, science, and art occupations, and 19.8 percent worked in sales and office occupations in 2015. Further, median income of households headed by an Asian American was $77,368 in 2015, and poverty rate was 12 percent.\(^6\)

**Exhibit 4: Education and Occupations of Asian Americans in 2015\(^6\)**

![Education and Occupations of Asian Americans in 2015](image-url)
Acculturation

As mentioned, it is important for safety-net service providers not to overlook interpersonal dynamics and contextual factors that contribute to Asian American families’ well-being. One of those factors is acculturation. As defined previously, acculturation refers to the process of one acquiring the cultural characteristics of the country he/she immigrates to. There are four types of acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Assimilation is when one gives up his/her home culture and identity to become immersed in the new culture. Separation is when one insists on his/her own culture and identity and rejects the new culture. Integration means that one not only maintains his/her own culture and identity but also participates in the new culture. Lastly, marginalization is when individuals have little interest to maintain their home cultural heritage or embrace a new cultural identity. Among John Berry’s acculturation strategies, integration is viewed as the most adaptive strategy. Table 7 shows the acculturation types.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>John Berry’s Model of Acculturation</th>
<th>Identification With Heritage Culture High</th>
<th>Identification With Heritage Culture Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification With U.S. Culture High</td>
<td>Integration (Bicultural)</td>
<td>Assimilation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification With U.S. Culture Low</td>
<td>Separation</td>
<td>Marginalization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Acculturation levels of Asian Americans may vary based on several factors, such as their length of time in the United States, country of origin, their country’s general attitude toward Western values, professional affiliation, and their age at the time of immigration. Generally speaking, personal stressors and life dissatisfaction decrease with increasing acculturation, and more acculturated individuals are more likely to recognize their need...
for human services. Social service providers can assess Asian Americans’ acculturation through various methods, including clients’ language use, media use, social relations, gender roles, societal norms, food preferences, holiday rituals, association with outside communities, and pride. It is worth mentioning that one critique of John Berry’s model is that it treats acculturation as if it is static. However, it is important to recognize, the fluid, dynamic, and reversible nature of acculturation and its influence on couple and familial relationships.

Acculturation and its Influence on Family Dynamics

Differing levels of acculturation influence Asian Americans’ family dynamics in varying ways. Many intergenerational disagreements and conflicts can arise in the process of acculturation. For example, some Asian parents who are often more traditional or conservative than their children may be concerned about the loss of cultural identity of the younger generations and become overly involved or forceful. While parents may insist on rules regarding group interdependence, obedience to elders, and traditional gender roles, their adolescent children, who are often more acculturated to American culture, may find these values frustrating. This might cause an acculturative gap that might create anxiety within members, family conflicts, and also might negatively impact the adolescents’ self-esteem.

Discrepancies between Chinese parents and adolescents, for example, can be seen on when to date, emphasis on academic achievement, displays of love and affection, living styles of thrift and consumption, independence, respect for authority, and individualism. Younger Korean-Americans often adhere less to traditional values compared to their immigrant parents as well. Parent-child conflicts include value differences, poor communication, parental control, academic expectations, and internalizing problems. Research also shows that there can be differences between parent and children’s values, known as intergenerational cultural dissonance, among Cambodian and Vietnamese immigrant families.

Acculturative stress not only has longer-term significance for those who migrate at a young age, but also for those who migrate later in life. Older South Asian Americans, for instance, regardless of their time spent in the United States, may share both physical and psychological challenges like lack of access to public transportation and medical resources, feelings of loneliness, difficulty of maintaining social and familial bonds in two countries, and
struggles with the decision of either staying with family in the United States or in their country of origin after retirement.\textsuperscript{76}

It should be noted, however, that not all Asian American parents and grandparents are traditional—parents in bicultural families are generally well-acculturated and exposed to Western influences. Many of these parents came to the United States as young adults and hold professional jobs. Their couple relationships are more equal, and family members discuss and make decisions together. Bicultural families may experience less parent-child and intergenerational conflicts. These families may go beyond any prior set norms, standards, or presuppositions. Some may be multiracial or interracial, immersed in different cultures, and be able to successfully integrate their multiple cultural identities.\textsuperscript{77} However, some may experience clashes in values, societal pressures, and identity confusion. “Americanized” or highly acculturated families may not be interested in maintaining connections with their culture of origin.\textsuperscript{78}
Section 5:

Improving Service Delivery to Asian American Families

Many safety-net service providers are not aware of how their personal biases, experiences, and expectations of how a normal family is structured affect their dealings with families and couples. Culture has a significant impact on family formations, the ways people seek expressions of love, and the way they interact in human service settings. Children learn interpersonal skills like effective communication and conflict resolution, as well as parenting and financial management skills, from their family of origin. This section provides information on utilization of services, the effects of stereotypes and racism, and explains the holistic understanding (versus mind-body split) found within Asian American culture groups in an effort to help service providers improve their capacity to serve Asian Americans.

Utilization of Services

Asian Americans in general have the lowest rates of utilization of human services among different ethnic populations regardless of gender, age, and geographic location. Low utilization rate has been attributed to shame and stigma related to using services, lack of financial resources, language difficulty, notions of illness and health, lack of awareness of services, and lack of culturally competent services. The “model minority” myth discussed later may also impact Asian American clients, as it assumes thatAsian Americans should not ask for help. This lack of utilization of human services not only indicates that beneficial services are not being utilized, but also that existing services are not able to serve this population in a culturally effective way.

In terms of different generations seeking services, third- or later generation individuals have higher rates of services use (19.3 percent) than first- (7.4 percent) or second-generation (8.1 percent), in both specialty mental health and general medical care. Further, Asian American college students are less likely to seek psychological services 12 months before a suicidal attempt than other populations. This attitude of hesitation toward services is especially true for recent immigrants who are often less acculturated and less accepting of Western practices. Many families see human services as a last resort. They only seek professional help when problems are very serious or they have stretched their family system to its limit. Families tend to drop out as soon as the severity and immediacy of the issue is decreased.

Did You Know?

Only about 6.8 percent of Asian Americans seek professional mental health services, compared to 18 percent in the general population.
In contrast, individuals with a higher acculturation rate may feel more positive about seeking human services, irrespective of their gender or the amount of time spent in the United States. As Chinese and Japanese were the first wave of immigrants to the United States, these families can range in how many generations are present in the United States. Chinese and Japanese individuals from the newer generation may be more open to seeking and receiving human services.

In general, help seeking behaviors of East Asian Americans have been improving over the past four decades. Regarding the issue of well-being and healthy relationships, knowledge has been acquired from both ends—the service providers and the Asian American communities. Some subcultures are beginning to warm up to the idea of human services and are broadening resources for their social and emotional well-being.

Like other Asian subgroups, South Asian immigrants prefer to depend on trusted sources of support such as family, social networks, or religious affiliations versus human service agencies. This is because of:

• Cultural stigma;
• The conservative nature of South Asian societies and the idea of “not taking their problems outside of the home;”
• A lack of understanding of mental health and illness;
• A lack of awareness of services available;
• A lack of culturally and linguistically responsive resources;
• Not trusting service providers; and
• The time and cost concern of the services.

But, like other Asian Americans, South Asian American families with higher acculturation rates are more likely to seek human services.

For Southeast Asian immigrants, the language barrier is possibly the largest hindrance to seeking the help they need. This is seen especially among older generations who have not learned English. Oftentimes, work and family obligations prevent older family members from engaging in English language trainings. For example, unskilled jobs in the seafood industries along coastal regions, where large numbers of Southeast Asian immigrants have settled, do not require the mastery of English. Many Southeast Asian immigrants, especially those from Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar (Burma) come from predominantly verbal, not written, traditions. Documentation can be difficult for a service provider to acquire, primarily because such documentation
was not within the normal patterns of daily life in their home countries. These challenges can tax the already burdened service provider. Use of clear checklists of documents and/or actions required for acquiring services, and translated into appropriate languages, can facilitate interactions and ease the path toward care.

**Stereotypes and the Model Minority Image**

There are several similarities across all Asian American families. One of the most prevalent is the notion that Asian Americans constitute a model minority of individuals who are self-sufficient. The model minority stereotype implies that Asian Americans are more successful academically and economically and do not experience extensive stress compared to other groups. They are seen as a hardworking and uncomplaining “model minority” of diligence and achievement. It also infers that this group does not require the public’s attention or resources for their psychological or social well-being. Common stereotypes that relate to Asian Americans include: they are a small and successful group, they solve their own problems, they live in harmony, and they do not experience mental health disparities.

In relation to other ethnic groups, many issues and social problems in these communities such as domestic violence, alcohol and substance abuse, gambling, gangs, and violence are overlooked. This stereotype may also leave mental illness with this population unnoticed and underreported. The persistent myth of the model minority may create family pressures and individual stresses. This lack of a range of realistic reflections of self may cause shame, stress, and identity crisis for those who do not “measure up” to the high standards and expectations placed upon them. For example, Punjabi Sikhs are known for their success, resilience, and diligence. This impression, however, could pressure individuals to live up to this high standard and not admit to “mental weakness.” Similarly, an East Asian child who does not succeed academically may be a “disappointment” to their parents as well as to the people around them. Those who struggle to balance their traditional expectations and desires to fit in may find this dilemma especially troublesome. The internalized model minority myth can cause self-hate and create an unfavorable help-seeking attitude. Moreover, problems may be kept secret to save face for the child and their families. Human service providers who have limited experiences working with this community must reflect on and become aware of the salient issues that perpetuate stereotypes so they can provide services that counter them.
“Cultural competence is not just a statement of quality practice. Cultural competence also requires advocacy and activism. It is critically important to provide quality services to those who find themselves marginalized, and it is also essential to disrupt the societal processes that marginalize populations.”

Suggested Resource
Enhancing Cultural Competence in Social Service Agencies: A Promising Approach to Serving Diverse Children and Families is a research brief from the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services that summarizes the state of the field on cultural competence in social services. The information is relevant for organizations serving children and families from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds and can be found at: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/brief_enhancing_cultural_competence_final_022114.pdf.

Chinese Parenting and the Tiger Mother Stereotype
Another perception in the United States that surrounds Chinese parenting in particular is that of the “tiger mother” who parents by being highly controlling and by using harsh and strict discipline. In a New York University online publication of undergraduate studies by Scarlett Wang, she discusses that only paying attention to these parenting practices, without understanding the cultural values behind them, can be problematic. Traditional Chinese parenting beliefs focus on “training,” or Chiaoshun, rooted in Confucius teachings. They include the importance of respect for the social order—employing methods to “train” a child to act in a socially acceptable manner so they, above all, become “a good person.” When looking at Chinese parenting with this understanding, the supposed tiger mother may make more sense as a way to prepare a child to succeed in an environment of social order and respect that embodies Chinese society. Even so, viewing Chinese parenting so decisively fails to capture the complexities of different styles, strategies, and beliefs of modern Chinese parents—especially immigrant parents. Many immigrant Chinese parents use both Chinese and American values to form blended, interconnected parenting styles.

Racism and Discrimination
Experiences of discrimination, racism, and hate crimes influence Asian American families in many ways. Racism can impact Asian Americans externally (e.g., bullying at school or in the workplace, or macroaggressions) and internally (e.g., internalized self-hate and low self-esteem). Some parents teach their children at a very early age how to detect, ignore,
or respond to discrimination. They model how to interpret messages of discrimination and the “right” way to deal with it. Some focus on stories of successful coping, which further strengthens their survival. However, some parents choose to keep instances of discrimination secret to hide family shame, while still others avoid this topic for the fear of “making it real.” All of these influence the ethnic identity, internalized racism, and acculturation of their children. They may experience polarization and stereotyping of their identity in reaction to this discrimination. Asian women may experience double (e.g., minority women) or multiple (e.g., poor minority women) jeopardies. Furthermore, certain Asian American family members may fall into the state of double or multiple jeopardy because of their accumulative disadvantages as ethnic minorities and social characteristics like old age, female, lower income, and sexual minority. However, they often receive unequal shares of attention and resources from the mainstream society. Service providers could discuss these vulnerabilities along with the family’s coping strategies to improve the general well-being of different family members.

Historically, early family studies often viewed Asian families as a problem and elaborated on how we as educators/researchers/human service providers could “fix” them. This idea of “fixing” and “formalizing” persons is pervasive in Western societies. When working with clients from this perspective, human service providers may unknowingly impose their view of mainstream culture, and repeat social stereotypes and oppression. Barriers can be overcome when service providers work from a culturally sensitive and competent approach. Stakeholders are encouraged to capture the holistic view of this population and to welcome rather than deny Asian American families’ stories.

Questions to Explore Experiences of Racism:
- “Do you feel welcomed in your neighborhood (schools, stores, or workplace)?”
- “Have you ever experienced racism?”
- “How do your experiences of racism influence your relationships and the way you think of yourself?”
- “How do you teach your child about racism?”

SUGGESTED RESOURCE
Teaching Tolerance, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, provides free resources focused on social justice and anti-bias to educators—teachers, administrators, counselors and other practitioners—who work with children from kindergarten through high school. Teaching Tolerance’s materials can be used to supplement educators’ own curriculum, to inform their practices, and to create an environment where children are respected and valued. View the website at: www.tolerance.org.
Holistic Health and Well-Being

Health and well-being is perceived in a much more holistic view and is often a combination of bio-psycho-social-spiritual aspects in Asian American cultures from all subgroups. Most people adopt a view that combines Eastern and Western medicine. Families may visit both hospitals for illnesses and alternative medicine or traditional herbalists for physical care. Some subcultures are more open than others to Western medication and treatment, especially individuals from modernized cities. It also depends on the family members’ acculturation level as well as educational and personal backgrounds.

In South Asia for example, Hinduism teaches a healthy living style with ethical and spiritual considerations. Yoga as a form of body care corrects disease though regulation of muscular action and meditation. Traditional medicine and herbalists are also commonly used. The holistic approach to health pays attention to both physical and spiritual aspects, which addresses nutrition, mind, stress, emotional balance, and good humanity.

In East Asia, Taoism describes well-being as the maintenance of the yin yang balance and the smooth flow of the vital energy, Qi, in one's physical, psychological, spiritual, and moral aspects of life. By following the teaching of Confucius and Tao, individuals work to maintain their peace of mind as well as harmony with the environment and people around them. One of the goals is to avoid negative emotions that would create harm to their bodies. Different emotions, especially negative ones, influence different parts of body in Chinese traditional medicine. For example, anger and resentment hurt one’s liver and circulation. Mental illness, on the other hand, may be a result of the unbalance of Qi, or the mind and body not being properly aligned. These philosophical, religious, and spiritual traditions help families resolve distress and make important life decisions.

Finally, in Southeast Asia, health intertwines throughout different spheres of life. The physical part of life, including the body’s ailments and sickness, and the mental life, including emotions and behavior, are viewed as manifestations of the spiritual life. For Southeast Asian immigrants, good holistic health starts with good spiritual health. Remedies for physical and mental health also are associated with a spiritual realm or making peace with ancestors or a higher being. Remedies can include praying, exorcisms, acupuncture, and herbal medicine. This view can clash with service providers who do not recognize the importance of religion in the health of Southeast Asians, and highlights the necessity of cultural awareness and responsiveness.

Distress and Alternative Ways of Healing

It is important for safety-net service providers to understand their clients’ beliefs regarding origin and treatment of distress, illness, and relationship problems. Many studies show
that Asian families are more likely to turn to alternative resources within their communities, such as alternative medicine (e.g., acupuncture, herbal remedies, cupping), traditional healers, fortune tellers, and religious/spiritual leaders for mental distress, somatic symptoms, and relationship problems.\textsuperscript{117} Also, some Asian Americans may attribute illness to a spiritual source because illnesses are often identified within religious texts. Individuals may associate health issues and psychological distress with karma, possession of ghosts or spirits, bad luck, heredity, or personality traits like lack of willpower, weakness, and laziness.\textsuperscript{118} In cultures where karma brings cyclical benefits and punishment, well-being and relationship problems are believed to be the result of disobeying the rules of behavior set forth through one’s religion.\textsuperscript{119} For example, in Buddhism, one’s bad karma could bring shame to the family. Therefore, families may choose to keep issues hidden from people outside of the family to prevent the family from “losing face” or being perceived as weak, resulting in avoidance and resistance to various social services.\textsuperscript{120} However, recent research clarifies that shame felt by families can vary depending on the presenting problems and what kind of “help” they are seeking—seeking professional services for relationship issues seems more acceptable than for individual emotional distress.\textsuperscript{121} Friends’ support is also found to motivate individuals to receive services.\textsuperscript{122}
Section 6: Strengthening Relationships

This section explores culturally responsive strategies for strengthening the relationships of Asian American families and ideas for providing and integrating healthy relationship education into services. In general, Asian American families have encountered various challenges to building healthy relationships in the United States. However, it is extremely important for human service providers to explore the many strengths of Asian American families and to stay away from generalizations—there are many differences among Asian American immigrants, even when they claim the same country of origin.

Spotlight on Domestic Violence

In order to work efficiently and effectively, social service providers must understand their clients’ perspectives and concerns about family dynamics and family safety. Domestic violence in Asian and Pacific Islander communities requires cultural expertise, because it can be compounded by many factors, including unique family dynamics and types of abuse, isolating sociocultural barriers, and the persistence of traditional cultural attitudes. The Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence is a national resource center providing research and resources, advocacy and prevention, and community support regarding domestic violence, sexual violence, trafficking, and other forms of gender-based violence in Asian and Pacific Islander communities. The Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based violence offers a directory of domestic violence agencies serving Asian and Pacific Islanders that can be found at: https://www.api-gbv.org/resources/directory-api-services/. For resources and more information, visit www.api-gbv.org.

SUGGESTED RESOURCE

Intimate Partner Violence in Immigrant and Refugee Communities: Challenges, Promising Practices, and Recommendations, a report prepared by the Family Violence Prevention Fund and funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, examines the issue of intimate partner violence (IPV) from a variety of standpoints. They include the legal rights and practical challenges facing immigrant and refugee victims of violence, the ways systems are responding, and the promising practices that offer hope for these victims. View the report at http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/userfiles/file/ImmigrantWomen/IPV_Report_March_2009.pdf.
Cultural Considerations for Healthy Relationship Education

Healthy marriage and relationship education teaches core relationship skills to individuals, couples, and families to help them achieve, maintain, and strengthen relationships. This education is often in a group setting and can be adjusted according to local strengths, needs, and capacity. It promotes clients’ healthy communication, conflict-resolution, parenting, and financial management. It also helps reduce clients’ stress and improve coping skills. Generally speaking, an approach to providing education that addresses the value of family and a holistic view of health and well-being tends to work well.\(^\text{25}\) Human service providers are encouraged to work with clients’ culture, not against it; they should use the strengths of culture as well as family members to find solutions to problems, dilemmas, and struggles.

As mentioned above, the changing economic, political, and sociocultural factors have had an effect on contemporary Asian American families. Also, overall Westernization influences Asians’ ideas and definitions about love in both of their countries of origin and in the United States. Most adults are looking for romantic love instead of arranged marriages. However, parents or grandparents may still have a strong impact on their child’s choice of romantic partner.\(^\text{26}\) Chances that a parent or family member sabotages a relationship that he/she does not approve are still high. This behavior may be hard to understand from a mainstream American culture view. However, it makes sense from a collective perspective, since a family member’s success may be a “group project” rather than a person’s own choice or accountability. The increasing attention on nuclear family and spousal relationships and changing gender roles within the couple relationship may be a source of family conflict but also a family strength. In addition, including topics such as relationships with extended family members and in-laws into healthy relationship education classes could be effective. Discussing the focus on individualism and self-autonomy in the next generation, while still showing respect to the elderly, can empower both the couple and their in-laws and strengthen the familial relationship.
Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education in Practice

The Home Sweet Home project is federally funded through the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families through the Korean Community Center of Greater Washington, and focuses on strengthening marital and family relationships. Specifically, one of their project components includes a Family Summer Camp that focuses on family cohesion and parenting skills development. They offer camps for Korean-speaking families and for Chinese-speaking families. Through outdoor activities, art projects, and many enriching family-building activities, family members develop stronger bonds with each other and all participants learn how to build and maintain healthy relationships. For more information, see: [http://www.kcscgw.org/services-2/family-enrichment-program/](http://www.kcscgw.org/services-2/family-enrichment-program/).

Tips for Culturally Competent Service Provision

- *Introduce the basic structure and function of your role.* South and East Asian Americans may favor concrete, logical, rational, and structured solutions and action plans.127
- *Establish trust.* The focus on interpersonal relationships makes the credibility of service providers a major deciding factor of participating in services. Credibility of providers may be established through trust. If providers are referred by a source deemed trustworthy, it is much more likely that Asian American families will attend services.
- *Pay attention to clients’ support systems and their attitudes toward human service providers.* This attitude might influence families’ attendance in services.128
- *Pay attention to psychosomatic complaints, such as chronic migraines, gastrointestinal problems, ulcers, heart problems, and high blood pressure.* They continue to be the most common presenting problem for Asian Americans and could suggest relationship problems, anxiety, or depression.129
- *Network with community ethnic centers, religious centers, and spiritual leaders to spread knowledge and bring awareness of healthy marriage and relationship education to this population.*
- *Provide healthy relationship education that is clear, concrete, and organized, with examples that illustrate differences between cultures.* Culture influences interactions within marriage and couple relationships. Gender roles can be discussed and challenged, but it is important to respect how cultural factors influence couples’ decisions.
Integration of Healthy Relationship Education

The National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families has demonstrated three levels regarding how healthy marriage and relationship education can be integrated into safety-net services. These three levels include basic engagement, partnerships, and full integration. Integration of healthy relationship education will vary based on an agency’s structure and service delivery methods. Below, the three levels are discussed as they may be applicable to integrating to serve Asian American families.

Levels of Integration

**Level 1 – Basic Engagement**

- e.g., place brochures for local healthy marriage workshops in reception area; hand out healthy relationship tip sheets to all clients.

**Level 2 – Partnerships**

- e.g., identify community partners for client referrals; bring relationship education programming onsite for clients.

**Level 3 – Full Integration**

- e.g., have trained staff or volunteers offer relationship education at career centers as part of job readiness programs, as foster parent in-service training, or as workshops for co-parenting individuals.

**Level 1 – Basic Engagement**

Social service providers may promote healthy relationship education by distributing information to colleagues and clients regarding the importance of these skills and how they support the overall strengthening of families. This is a great way to begin a dialogue and a fairly low-cost approach to increasing public awareness. Depending upon the agency’s service delivery system, this could include placing tip sheets or fact
sheets in a waiting area or at in-service trainings, staff meetings, community meetings, or agency-sponsored town hall events. Organizations could also add articles about healthy relationships to client newsletters or offer access to training on financial education tools. The collectivist patterns found in Asian American immigrant communities makes promoting healthy relationship education materials through health screenings a potential option. Oftentimes, groups of elderly immigrants travel together to local community centers when health care providers send notices through traditional pathways, such as temples, and stress that co-ethnic translators will be present. In marketing tip sheets, articles, and tools, cultural responsiveness should be adopted. A simple way to ensure cultural responsiveness is to make sure that documents are translated in a way that make sense to particular immigrant groups. Oftentimes, this does not mean a direct translation. Instead, it should be determined if concepts align across languages.

The National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families has a Virtual Library with more than 3,000 free materials in a variety of formats, including factsheets, research-to-practice briefs, brochures, pamphlets, training resources, program reports or evaluations, and research reports. Visit www.HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org to learn more.

**Level 2 – Partnerships**

Develop partnerships with community agencies that offer interpersonal or critical skills and accept referrals or even offer workshops onsite for stakeholders. Partnerships can be beneficial to building agency capacity by securing resources, including facilities, volunteers, staff, and funding, as well as sharing ideas for successful integration. Providers may want to network with spiritual and religious leaders, such as priests or monks, and local ethnic cultural centers to serve Asian Americans. These culturally embedded places can serve as a foundation for socializing and community advocating, processes that promote the well-being of local residents. Collaborations such as these uphold and honor local knowledge and facilitate use of existing resources. Furthermore, the spiritual leaders’ perspective on healthy relationships influences the community.

**Level 3 – Full Integration**

Incorporate a comprehensive healthy marriage and relationship education program into existing services. Full integration involves training service providers and agency staff or volunteers to teach healthy relationship skills as part of existing individualized services or offer group-based programs for individuals and families being served by the safety-net provider agency. For example, if home visits are the main form of contact, staff can be trained to integrate healthy relationship education into their discussions with families during the home visit. If classes or workshops are already part of a service delivery
system, healthy relationship education curricula could be included to encourage participants to adopt and strengthen these skills. Agencies are encouraged to include staff or providers who speak the same language or are from similar ethnic backgrounds. Many Asian families prefer working with such providers. South Asian clients may even find female service providers dressed in traditional Sari and indicated as married as having face validity and credibility for discussing familial issues.

Many considerations are involved in program planning, development, and implementation. The National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families website features helpful tips and tools on full integration and program development for State, local, and Tribal stakeholders. Visit www.HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org/program-development to learn more.
References


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