

# The Relationship Between Family Harmony/Cohesion and Mental Health Among Asian American Adolescents

Erin Ryu

California State University, Fullerton, Department of Social Work

## Abstract

- There has been an upward trend between mental health struggles and Asian American adolescents.
- This study explores the different factors affecting the mental health of Asian American immigrants, especially family dynamics.
- The goal of the current study is to examine the relationship between family harmony and cohesion and mental health among Asian American immigrant adolescents.
- Similar to other research studies about family cohesion and harmony amongst Asian American immigrants, the current study indicated that increased family support plays a substantial role in mitigating mental health issues.



## Introduction

### Significance of Study

- The importance of mental health is often overlooked, especially amongst Asian Americans, who underutilize mental health services (Jacob et al., 2011; Meyer et al., 2009).
- There has been an upward troubling trend between Asian American adolescents and mental health struggles. Depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation are on the rise, even becoming more serious in severity (Choi et al., 2020).
- Adolescents are forced to interact with mainstream culture and become at risk of facing discrimination from peers at school (Pumariega et al., 2005).
- Intergenerational cultural conflict in the family, experiences of racial discrimination, poor ethnic identity, and negative peer and family relationships are all contributing factors (Choi et al., 2020).
- It is crucial to understand family values and cohesion when working with Asian Americans since they possess distinct cultural values (Jacob et al., 2011).

### Purpose of Study

- The purpose of this study is to examine the different factors affecting the mental health of Asian American immigrants and their children.

### Research Question

- What is the relationship between family harmony and cohesion and mental health among Asian American immigrant adolescents?

### Hypothesis

- The hypothesis for this study predicts a negative correlation between family harmony and cohesion and mental health issues.

## Literature Review

### Mental Health of Asian American Adolescents

- 28% of Asian American high school students reported having feelings of severe depression, 19% had made a suicide plan, and 11% made a suicide attempt (Ozer & McDonald, 2006; Speller, 2005).
- Intergenerational cultural conflict, such as intergenerational differences in values and language proficiency, is correlated with the upsurge of mental health distress (Chae et al., 2012; Choi et al., 2020).

### Asian American Family Values

- The family strongly influences psychological functioning, and any disruption may be a threat to one's sense of self and well-being (Masood et al., 2009; Wong et al., 2012).
- Asian American adolescents are pulled in between the collectivist family traditions and Western society's emphasis on the individual (Jacob et al., 2011).
- Children may wish to develop their own identity in U.S. society that is at odds with their heritage culture (Jacob et al., 2011; Huang et al., 2017).

### Family Cohesion and Support

- Family cohesion is often characterized by loyalty to family, filial piety, fulfilling family obligations, putting family members' needs before one's own, and maintaining harmonious relationships (Yee et al., 2007).
- Family cohesion and parental support played an influential role in buffering the adverse mental health effects of various stressors (Chae et al., 2012; Yoon & Lau, 2008).

## Methods

### Research Design

- The current study is a secondary data analysis of the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS) that took place between 1991-2006 (Portes & Rumbaut, 2018).
- The CILS was a longitudinal study that sampled 5,262 children of immigrants from early adolescence to early adulthood to study the adaptation process of second generation immigrants.
- The original respondents were 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade students attending public and private schools in the metropolitan areas of Miami/Ft. Lauderdale, FL and San Diego, CA.

### Sampling Method

- From the 4,288 respondents that participated in the second wave, they were filtered by race to only include those of Asian descent to become a sample size of 985.
- The filter was determined by utilizing the question from the survey, "Which of the races listed do you consider yourself to be?" (Portes & Rumbaut, 2018).
- Participants who failed to answer all family harmony and cohesion and mental health questions were excluded.

### Measures

- Independent variable: The independent variable for this study is family harmony/cohesion, measured by parent togetherness and family togetherness.
- Dependent variable: The dependent variable for this study is mental health, measured by self-esteem and depression.

## Conclusion

- As family and parent togetherness increased, self-esteem increased. As family and parent togetherness increased, depression decreased.
- Family cohesion and harmony are vital to buffering negative mental health challenges that Asian Americans face.
- Discrepancies in familial and cultural values hurts family cohesion, resulting in the lack of safeguarding especially against depression.
- Family cohesion, therefore, is extremely important as Asian American adolescents experience depression and suicidal ideation more than any other mental illness.

### Implications

- There is a need for culturally competent services to meet the different needs of multicultural populations (Sue et al., 2009).
- Social workers working with this population should be cognizant of the adolescent's family values and dynamics, and how it may differ from their own.
- Asian Americans with more family discord may seek out mental health services more often, indicating that family dynamics should be assessed and explored (Chang et al., 2013).
- Along with developing and providing culturally competent services, there is a need for more outreach, since Asian Americans access mental health services at lower rates due to feeling stigma more prominently (Li & Seidman, 2010).

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## Results

Table 2

Regression Model for Self-Esteem

Predictor	B	SE	B
Constant***	14.753	.585	
Gender***	.650	.312	.061
Respondent U.S. Citizen*	1.315	.318	.121
Family Togetherness***	.233	.059	.127
Parent Togetherness***	.762	.079	.311

Reference groups: Female & Not a U.S. Citizen. \*\*\*p < .001; \*\*p < .01; \*p < .05

Table 3

Regression Model for Depression

Predictor	B	SE	B
Constant***	5.787	.282	
Gender***	-.645	.150	-.128
Respondent U.S. Citizen	.067	.153	.013
Family Togetherness***	-.071	.028	-.082
Parent Togetherness***	-.342	.038	-.296

Reference groups: Female & Not a U.S. Citizen. \*\*\*p < .001; \*\*p < .01; \*p < .05

### Self-Esteem

- A significant regression equation was found ( $F(4, 980) = 48.95$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .17.
- A study participant's predicted self-esteem was equal to  $14.753 + .650(\text{gender}) + 1.315(\text{citizenship}) + .233(\text{family togetherness}) + .762(\text{parental togetherness})$ .
- Male study participants with higher levels of family and parental togetherness experienced higher levels of self-esteem ( $p < .001$ ).
- Citizens, on average, experienced 1.315 points higher in self-esteem than non-citizens ( $p = .038$ ).

### Depression

- A significant regression equation was found ( $F(4, 980) = 37.72$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .13.
- A study participant's predicted depression was equal to  $5.787 - .645(\text{gender}) + .067(\text{citizenship}) - .071(\text{family togetherness}) - .342(\text{parental togetherness})$ .
- Male study participants with higher levels of family and parental togetherness experienced lower levels of depression ( $p < .001$ ).
- Citizenship was not a significant predictor of depression among the study participants ( $p = .663$ ).