

JCLS DE&I Journal Club Session #3 (4/30/21)

Topic: **Living through the Covid-19 pandemic, Mental Health Challenges & Coping Strategies for Anti-Asian Racism**

Speakers:

- Fanghong Dong, PhD, MA, Post Doctoral Fellow, School of Nursing, University of Pennsylvania
- Yeju Hwang, MSN, RN, School of Nursing, University of Pennsylvania

Date/Time: Friday, April 30th, 2021 at 4 pm

Introduction

(Sessions will be recorded for documentation purposes and will not be released to the public at any time)

“There are so many challenges facing the Asian and international community now.”

- A moment of silence was shared in honor of Shane Nguyen and all other victims of hate crimes.
- Voices from our own Jefferson community making a change: Lina Byrne-Dugan, PhD published an article on The Nexus (nexus.jefferson.edu; <https://nexus.jefferson.edu/life-at-jefferson/stop-aapi-hate-a-plea-from-a-community-in-grief/>) titled ““Stop AAPI Hate” - A Plea from a Community in Grief’

Article Review

Early COVID-19 articles about impact of Anti-Asian Racism/Discrimination on AAPI Community

- Paper #1: April 2020: Rise in anti-Asian discrimination; Mental health concerns for Asian-international students (especially from China); Warning – issues may get worse, therefore we should invest in and build infrastructure to support working with students in crisis for this pandemic and future crises.
 - Zhai, Y., and Du, X. (2020). *Mental health care for international Chinese students affected by the COVID-19 outbreak*. The Lancet Psychiatry, 7(4), e22.
[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366\(20\)30089-4/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366(20)30089-4/fulltext)
- Paper #2: October 2020: Explored the effects of anti-Asian discrimination on different mental and physical health outcome; Study shows there is an increase in anti-Asian racism to the COVID-19 pandemic
 - Lee, S., & Waters, S. F. (2020). *Asians and Asian Americans’ experiences of racial discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic: Impacts on health outcomes and the buffering role of social support*. Stigma and Health.
<https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2020-77454-001.pdf>

Quantitative Results

- COVID-19 impact is correlated with physical and mental health challenges
- Social support can buffer effect discrimination

Qualitative Results

- Personal experience with discrimination: Treated suspiciously in public, racist jokes, attacks (physical and verbal), financial hardships

- Experiences with stigmatizing anti-Asian racist culture: Overheard racist comments; heard about discrimination by others in the news
- Ways to prevent to exposure to discrimination: Live in a racially diverse community; social distancing

Speakers' Presentation

Background

- International Students: the largest proportion of international students is from Asian countries such as China, Korea, Japan, India, or the Philippines
- Mental Health: International graduate students are at risk of developing mental health problems such as depression and anxiety
- COVID-19: The novel corona virus 2019 started to spread in December 2019
- "Yellow Peril": Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Indian ... "Chinese virus"

Funding: The speakers' research was supported by UPenn's "Campaign for Community" program (<https://provost.upenn.edu/campaign-community>)

Study 1: To investigate the relationship between racial discrimination, social isolation, and mental health among international Asian graduate students during the pandemic.

- Quantitative Data collection: July 2020 – September 2021
- Participants from UPenn, Temple, Jefferson, Drexel
- Characteristics of participants ($N=177$): 38% Doctoral, 38% Master, 20% Post-Doc, 3% Exchange student
- Perceived racial discrimination: 50.3% Yes, 49.7% No
- Mental health challenges:
 - o Depression: 47% none or very mild, 33% mild, 14% moderate, 6% severe
 - o Anxiety: 54% none or very mild, 34% mild, 9% moderate, 3% severe

Study 2: To explore international Asian graduate students' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to probe for their coping strategies and their mental health needs.

- Qualitative Data collection: September 2021 – October 2020
- Resulting themes:
 - o "We are left alone here"
 - o Facing challenges, but stay involved
 - o "I have a wish"

Discussion

Proposed Questions from the Speakers

Q1. When you think of Asian hate crime, what pops up in your mind? Do you think racism towards Asians existed before COVID or COVID highlighted the racism towards Asians?

- On campus, discrimination happens: microaggressions common pre-covid
- Microaggressions against the Asian people predates COVID and appears to be getting worse during COVID
- There is tension between the USA and China and people will use any news as a scapegoat to target the opposition
- Racism is ingrained in our country's history

Q2. What do we need as a Philadelphia community to promote our mental health amid COVID-19?

- We can normalize these conversations to promote our mental health
- Using mental health counselors and therapy
- Adopt new or revisit old hobbies
- Join groups with peers to alleviate stress levels

Questions from the Attendees

- Can we develop a system using a small group of volunteers to help walk people to go get groceries?
 - This could be useful for helping Asian and international students feel more comfortable and safer while completing routine tasks in public
- Could comparisons be made between universities that participants came from for the study?
 - Do to the heterogeneity of the participants from each university, meaningful comparisons could not be made
 - The language used by a university in their public statements and emails matter
 - Universities reacted very differently in terms of policies (ex. Visa status)

Quotes

“I really like that we have these discussions, and we aren’t just focusing on one group of people. Everybody has their set of problems and issues that they’re dealing with and we need to have as much fervor and enthusiasm for other people who are going through it as we do for our own selves.”