

Study urges reconsidering therapy for Asian, Latino students

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Interdependent values in their communities make Latino and Asian college students less likely to seek mental health services, according to a recently published study.

Both communities are experiencing deteriorating mental health and have similarly low rates of seeking [mental health services](#) on college campuses nationwide, with about 75% of Asian students and 65% of Latino students with [mental health problems](#) going untreated.

The study sought to identify shared [cultural values](#) between the communities, in the interest of influencing campus messages to encourage mental health help-seeking.

"This means counselors can identify a culturally sensitive, value-driven approach to encouraging greater participation in campus mental health services, instead of focusing only on students' ethnicity in their [outreach efforts](#)" said Kalina Michalska, the study's senior author and a UCR psychology researcher. "Given the increasing diversity among U.S. college students, there is an urgent need for universities to develop proactive and culturally informed programs designed to improve mental health support for students, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds."

The study carries particular relevance to Southern California campuses such as UC Riverside, where there is a high percentage of both Asian (33.8%) and Latino (41.5%) students, with both groups accessing mental health services at rates lower than their white peers.

Many factors may lead Asian and Latino students to engage less with campus mental health services than their white counterparts, the authors wrote. They include discrimination by providers, structural, financial, and linguistic barriers, and cultural values that may impede mental health treatment seeking. Because Western culture is more focused on independence rather than interdependence, Michalska said white students may be less burdened by perceived stigma and be more likely to seek out campus mental health services than students who endorse interdependent values.

The researchers theorized that the Latino and Asian cultures share familism—the duty to assist, support, and respect one's family. They sought to establish the link between that and a relative unwillingness to seek psychological help on campus. Maybe the students found support through family or religion, the researchers theorized. Or maybe they associated greater stigma with mental illness, and therefore shame from their families and communities.

In the study, 159 largely first-year Asian and Latino students completed an online survey in which they reported their adherence to cultural values, their attitudes toward mental health, and their willingness to seek [campus](#) mental health resources. The researchers employed the 25-question "Asian Value Scale," which gages the degree to which participants agree with statements such as "one should consider the needs of others before considering one's own needs," and "one should not deviate from familial and social norms." The 35-question "Latino Values Scale" asked participants to gage their reactions to statements such as "one's family is the main source of one's identity" and "one must not offend others."

Mental health attitudes were assessed by 35 questions from two questionnaires. The questions included "Are you currently living with someone with a mental health problem?" and "I would be willing to live with someone with a mental health problem." Finally, participants were asked whether they were seeking mental health care or considering it.

The researchers found both sets of students share community values surrounding family, group, and culture. Importantly, the more students shared the interdependent values of their culture, the less likely they were to perceive a need for or to seek mental health treatment. Their willingness to honor their cultures did not predict their attitudes toward mental [health](#) help-seeking.

Michalska said the findings suggest educational institutions should invest in culturally tailored [mental health](#) treatment services that address shame, stigma, and family obligations.

The study, "Shared Cultural Values Influence Mental Health Help-Seeking Behaviors in Asian and Latinx College Students," was published in the *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*.

More information: E. Zhou et al, Shared Cultural Values Influence Mental Health Help-Seeking Behaviors in Asian and Latinx College Students, *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities* (2021). [DOI: 10.1007/s40615-021-01073-w](#)

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