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Vietnamese American Undergraduates' Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help

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Abstract

In that personal and educational needs of Asian American students are masked by aggregation of different Asian ethnicities this study specifically addressed Vietnamese American undergraduates. With the increasing enrollment of Vietnamese Americans in higher education, the influence of their psychological, social, and cultural experiences on their help-seeking behavior within the university setting is warranted. In particular, the differences in and relationship of acculturation, internalization of the model minority stereotype, cultural congruity, and university environment on help-seeking attitudes was addressed. Results both support and contradict previous research findings with Vietnamese Americans and other Asian American student groups, underscoring the importance of examining inter-group and intra-group differences. Discussion, implications, and future research are provided to clarify the study's findings.

Asian Americans in Higher Education

- ♦ Largest racial/ethnic group in higher education, making up approximately 19.3% of U.S. college student population (NCES, 2004)
 - ω Vietnamese Americans among largest Asian subgroups in higher education comprising 25% (ACES, 2006)
 - ω Enrollment increased 43.5% from 1993-2003 (ACES, 2006)
- ♦ Perceptions of the university environment and congruity between the universities' and students' culture play an essential role in students' experience, affecting students sense of academic persistence decisions (Gloria & Ho, 2003)
 - ♦ Microaggressions within higher education settings influence students' sense of welcome and belonging (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007)
 - ♦ Vietnamese reported among highest positive perceptions of university environment, cultural congruity, and college and educational behaviors self-efficacy in comparison to Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, and Pacific Islander undergraduate counterparts (Gloria & Ho, 2003)
- ♦ With varied experiences of different Asian ethnicities, need for ethnic-specific investigations is warranted (Gloria & Ho, 2003; Suzuki, 1995)

Help-seeking attitudes of Racial Ethnic Minority & Asian American Undergraduates

- ♦ Research has substantiated attitudes toward counseling vary by race/ethnicity (Leong, Wagner, Tata, 1995) and gender (Solberg, Ritsma, Davis, Tata, & Jolly, 1994)
 - ♦ In large-scale study of undergraduates, REMs and females had more positive help-seeking attitudes than Whites and males, respectively
 - ♦ Cultural fit (university environment and cultural congruity) more predictive for REMs than Whites (Gloria, Hird, & Navarro, 2001)
 - ♦ Asian American female undergraduates have more positive help-seeking attitudes than male counterparts (Yeh & Wang, 2000)
 - ♦ Korean American female undergraduates reported higher cultural congruity and more positive attitudes toward counseling than male counterparts (Gloria, Castellanos, Park, & Kim, 2008)
- ♦ Equivocal findings for help-seeking for different Asian Americans
 - ♦ No differences between Chinese, Indian, Korean, Philippine, and Taiwanese students on willingness to seek help; however, females more likely to seek academic support than males (Solberg et al., 1994)
 - ♦ No gender or ethnic differences in help-seeking for undergraduates of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean descent (Atkinson & Gim, 1989)
 - ♦ Korean American female undergraduates reported higher cultural congruity and more positive attitudes toward counseling than male counterparts (Gloria, Castellanos, Park, & Kim, 2008)
- ♦ Role of cultural values warrants attention given influence of emotional self-control and belief in ability to resolve own psychological concerns for many Asian Americans (Atkinson, Lowe, & Matthews, 1995; Kim, Atkinson, & Umemoto, 2001)
 - ♦ Stigma associated with mental health issues for Vietnamese Americans (Nguyen, 1999) and role of prioritizing problems/concerns (Nguyen & Anderson, 2005)
 - ♦ System of help-seeking hierarchical, where concerns addressed in family first and outside services sought only when concerns cannot be resolved (Nguyen & Anderson, 2005)
 - ♦ Relationship of acculturation and help-seeking inconsistent
 - ♦ Direct relationship of acculturation and help-seeking (Tata & Leung, 1994)
 - ♦ Less acculturated Asian Americans more willing to seek counseling (Gim et al., 1990)
 - ♦ Values adherence negatively predicted help-seeking attitudes, and help-seeking attitudes mediated relationship of Asian values adherence and willingness to seek help from a counselor (Kim & Omizo, 2003)
 - ♦ For 210 Vietnamese Americans, higher levels of acculturation, cultural barriers, age, and occupation related to more positive help-seeking attitudes with lower levels of spiritual beliefs associated with more positive help-seeking attitudes (Luu & Leung, & Nash, 2009)

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

To conduct an Asian-ethnic specific examination of help-seeking attitudes for Vietnamese American undergraduates within the university context

- ♦ To assess sex and class standing differences for the study's variables
- ♦ To examine differences in and relationships of the study's variables
- ♦ To determine extent to which previously-substantiated constructs of values adherence, negative self-beliefs, and cultural fit influence help-seeking attitudes for Vietnamese Americans undergraduates

Procedures and Setting

- ♦ IRB-approved study conducted at West Coast Research Institution with more than half of student population Asian American undergraduates
- ♦ Students recruited via nonparametric sampling method from Vietnamese-based student organizations and classes
- ♦ Paper and pencil survey with 5 counterbalanced standardized scales
- ♦ Survey took 15-20 minutes to complete
- ♦ Return of survey served as student consent, 71% response rate
- ♦ No incentive provided

114 Vietnamese Americans					
Gender 53 males 59 females 2 missing Age = 20.46 (<i>SD</i> = 1.38) 18 to 24 Generation 24 First 88 Second 1 Third 1 Missing	Class Standing 14 Freshman 22 Sophomores 37 Juniors 41 Seniors 2 Missing GPA = 3.07 (<i>SD</i> = .44) 2.20 to 3.90 Living 54 with family 36 with friends 11 on-campus 6 other 7 Missing	Department 3 Arts 40 Biological Sciences 7 Engineering 16 Humanities 5 Information & Computer Sciences 10 Social Ecology 28 Social Sciences 5 Undeclared 1 Missing 88 Value degree working toward	Father's Education 2 No formal education 1 Elementary school 2 Middle school 7 Some high school 22 High school 32 Some college 27 BA/BS 10 MA/MS/MBA 2 PhD/EdD 4 Professional 5 Other	Mother's Education 4 No formal education 3 Elementary school 9 Middle school 10 Some high school 37 High school 29 Some college 16 BA/BS 4 MA/MS/MBA 0 PhD/EdD 1 Other 1 Missing	Funding 50 part-time work 5 full-time work 65 family 63 student loans 33 scholarships 20 savings Transfer status 15 yes 85 no 14 missing Status All but two students single

Instruments				
	<i>Scales</i>	<i>Construct Measured</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Alpha</i>
1	Demographic Information	Personal and educational questions	20	- -
2	Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale (SL-ASIA) (Suinn, Rickard-Figueroa, Lew, & Vigil, 1992)	Level of adherence to cultural values	21	.79
3	Internalization of Model Minority Stereotype (IMMS) (Chen, 1995)	Internalization of myths of model minority stereotype	29	.91
4	University Environment Scale (UES) (Gloria & Kurpius, 1996)	Perceptions of university environment	14	.69
5	Cultural Congruity Scale (CCS) (Gloria & Kurpius, 1996)	Cultural fit of personal and environmental values	13	.84
6	Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help-Short (ATSPPH-SF) (Fischer & Farina, 1995)	Attitudes toward help-seeking or counseling	10	.73

Results

- ♦ 2 x 2 MANOVA assessed differences by sex and class standing
 - ♦ Main effect for sex, $\lambda = .87$, $F(5, 91) = 2.64$, $p \leq .05$, $\eta^2 = .13$
 - ♦ Females reported higher ATSPPH-SF than males ($F = 12.18$, $p \leq .001$, $\eta^2 = .11$)
 - ♦ Main effect for class standing and sex by class standing interaction non-significant
- ♦ No significant correlations between predictor variables and criterion variable ($p > .05$)

- ◆ Correlations by sex and class standing revealed differences in strengths of relationships (r to z transformation scores)
 - ◆ Males stronger relationship than females:
 - ◆ SL-ASIA and IMMS ($z = 1.94, p \leq .05$)
 - ◆ IMMS and CCS ($z = 1.87, p = .06$)
 - ◆ Females stronger relationship than males for:
 - ◆ SL-ASIA and UES ($z = 2.44, p \leq .05$)
 - ◆ Lower stronger relationship than upper
 - ◆ CCS and UES ($z = 1.63, p \leq .05, \text{one-tail}$)

Hierarchical Regression for Variables Predicting Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help

	β	t	R	Adj. R2	Δr^2	ΔF
Step 1			.36	.11	.13	7.03***
Gender	-.35	-3.66***				
Class Standing	-.11	-1.18				
Step 2			.36	.10	.00	.28
SL-ASIA	-.05	-.53				
Step 3			.37	.10	.01	.77
IMMS	.08	.88				
Step 4			.43	.13	.05	2.68
UES	.21	2.08				
CCS	-.16	-1.51*				

Notes. $F(4, 94) = 3.74, p \leq .001$

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$

Mean Differences for Individual Items of ATSPPH-SF by Sex

Item	t	p	Male		Female	
			M	SD	M	SD
Idea of talking about problems with a psychologist strikes me as a poor way to get rid of emotional conflicts	2.44	.05	2.49	.90	2.07	.88
I would want to get psychological help if I were worried or upset for a long period of time	4.33	.001	2.53	.92	1.80	.81
I might want to have psychological counseling in the future	2.67	.01	3.12	.84	2.63	1.03
Personal and emotional troubles, like many things, tend to work out by themselves	2.21	.05	2.80	.96	2.42	.84

Note. Lower ATSPPH-SF reflects more positive help-seeking attitudes

Discussion, Implications, and Directions for Future Research

- ◆ Overall findings were not as anticipated regarding differences in and relationships of constructs for Vietnamese American undergraduates' help-seeking attitudes
 - ◆ Females reported more positive attitudes toward help-seeking than males, which is similar to findings for REM (Gloria, Hird, & Navarro, 2001), Asian American (Yeh & Wang, 2000) and Korean American (Gloria, Castellanos, Park, & Kim, 2008) undergraduates
 - ◆ Individual assessment of ATSPPH-SF items reveal females perceived talking with a psychologist might be helpful in future or if having personal/emotional conflicts or troubles

- ◆ Attitudes about and decisions for female students of color on colleges to seek help may in part be explained by different coping responses used as females more apt to use direct and actively planned coping response (Gloria, Castellanos, Segura-Herrera, & Mayorga, in press)
- ◆ Exploration of specific culture- and gender-based approaches used to negotiate personal needs and/or gain support warrants additional research for Vietnamese American undergraduates (West-Olatunji, Fraizer, Guy, Smith, Clay, & Breaux, 2007)
- ◆ Findings underscore need for ethnic-specific investigations for Asian American which emphasize within-group differences (e.g., gender, class standing, generation) and processes
- ◆ Non-relationship of students' adherence to cultural values, internalization of stereotype, perception of the university environment, and cultural congruity to help-seeking attitudes both in contrast and similar to previous Asian American undergraduate-focused research
 - ◆ Decreased adherence to cultural values predictive of increased help-seeking attitudes; however, perception of university environment and cultural congruity not related to help-seeking attitudes for Korean American undergraduates (Gloria, Castellanos, Park, & Kim, 2008)
 - ◆ Culture undoubtedly influences help-seeking process (Duncan, 2003; Leung et al., 1995; Luu, Leung, & Nash, 2009) despite non-relationships evidenced
 - ◆ Calls for more in-depth understanding of the meaning and mattering of cultural values and gender-scripted notions within the university setting (Gloria, Castellanos, Segura-Herrera, & Mayorga, in press), emphasizing attitudinal versus behavioral approach to acculturation (Castillo, Conoley, & Brossart, 2004) and differing acculturation adherence for females and males (Chung, Bemack, & Wong, 2000)
- ◆ Differences in strength of relationships persuasive in understanding relationships of variables as they are more challenging to demonstrate than mean differences (McClelland & Judd, 1993)
 - ◆ For Vietnamese American females, the relationship of higher values adherence related to more positive perceptions of university environment ($r = .39$) than males ($r = -.09$); however, relationship of increased values adherence and decreased internalization of the model minority stereotype stronger for males ($r = -.32$) than females ($r = .06$)
 - ◆ Values adherence related to different educational processes for Vietnamese American undergraduate males and females
 - ◆ Findings point to influence of university campus and broader educational considerations (e.g., stereotypes) from a gender perspective
 - ◆ Need for gender-specific student development programming for Vietnamese American undergraduates

Limitations ~ Additional Future Research

- ◆ Non-parametric sampling method used ~ Work with university administration to identify Vietnamese American student population on campus (e.g., send survey announcement via email)
- ◆ Sample primarily second-generation students, not allowing for full analyses ~ Implement measures to address proximal Vietnamese values and processes
- ◆ Help-seeking limited to formalized counseling ~ Expand notion of help in particular for undergraduates whose needs might be better served by psychoeducational, cultural and contextualized interactions, or education-based approaches (e.g., use of academic services, peer mentoring, cultural club affiliations)