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Title: Counseling the Asian American Client
Workshop presentation handouts

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Proposal: Over the past three decades, the Asian American population has been one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in the United States. The 1990 census report indicates that there are 7.3 million Asian Americans in the U.S. The issues for many Asian Americans are varied and can involve emotional, social, marital/familial, and alcohol and drug related problems. Asian Americans, it seems, have difficulty seeking treatment. Additionally, once treatment is initiated there appears to be inherent difficulties in the perception and process of counseling. There are many theories as to why Asian Americans have difficulties with treatment. This presentation will explore some of these theories and various issues to consider when counseling the Asian American client.

Goal :

1. Improve counselors' cultural awareness of Asian Americans
2. Identify counseling issues specific to the Asian American client
3. Explore effective treatment approaches and modalities

Content:

Introduction

A. Occurrence of emotional, alcohol and drug related problems

1. Current research and statistics
2. Awareness of issues/personal knowledge and experience

B. Historical and cultural information: myth and reality

1. Asians in America: 150 years
2. Myths, misconceptions and madness

C. Counseling and Treatment Issues,

1. Difficulties experienced by the counselor and by the client

2. The therapeutic relationship--considerations.

Myth, History and Reality:

The 1990 Census reports 7.3 million Asian Americans reside in the United States.

Regional:

319,500 or 1.9% of the Texas population

67,700 or 2.5% of the Dallas population

30,600 or 2.2% of the Fort Worth population

Asians are one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in the United States.

All Asians are not from the same country. At one time, Asia covered 17 million square miles. Today, Asia has a population of 2.6 billion people or 60% of the world's total population.

Asians are not new to this country. Asians have a 150 year history in the United States. Some important historical events, yet not widely known facts include:

1852 20,000 Chinese were in the U.S., like the Europeans, for the Gold Rush. However, unlike the Europeans who were allowed to become citizens, the Chinese were barred from citizenship. As "foreigners", that same year the Chinese became subject to a "foreign miners" tax. By 1870, 25% to 50% of California's state revenue came from this taxation of the Chinese. who labored as miners and who later worked on the railroads.

1867 12,000 Chinese worked on the Central Pacific Railroad. The expression, "Not a Chinaman's chance" is derived from comments made by white Americans regarding the high risk explosive work assigned to the Chinese laborers.

1866 Chinese Exclusion Act -- First time in U.S. history that a group is excluded from U.S. immigration based solely on race.

1900 Plantation owners in Hawaii used Asian workers. Workers were often shipped in, treated harshly and suffered overcrowded conditions. If workers tried to escape, they were tracked down by plantation teams and police.

1913 Alien Land Act -- Law to continue the practice of barring non- citizens (Asians) from land ownership.

1924 Immigration Act of 1924 -- Law barring entry of Asian families, specifically to exclude Chinese and Japanese women.

1942 Executive Order 9066 -- FDR- camps-120,000 Japanese 66% are Nisei (American born).

13,500 Chinese males and 33,000 Nisei were drafted or voluntarily served in the military. 442nd Division, Japanese Americans: 1000 men, 200 lived, 18,000 decorations, most of any unit in US history.

1952 McCarran-Walter Act allowed Asians to become naturalized citizens.

1959 Asian Americans are allowed to bring over families.

1965 Immigration Act of 1965 removed anti-Asian bias in immigration.

Asian Americans are no different from other ethnic groups regarding the occurrence of social, economic, familial, or psychological problems. Although there has been little research conducted, some recent studies indicate that Asian Americans have comparable occurrences of alcohol/drug abuse, gambling, domestic violence etc.

The myth that Asian Americans are a "Model Minority" has caused problems within the Asian community by setting unrealistic expectations for themselves and by adversely affecting the perception, reaction and acceptance levels of other ethnic groups. In addition, this label with its implied messages has hindered Asian Americans in seeking and accepting social and community services and counseling.

Asians Americans face challenge and change. Asian Americans are becoming more active in the community and beginning to seek services. Some issues confronting these individuals are assimilation and identity, intergenerational difficulties, social/political realities and bias, achievement/advancement and the "glass ceiling", bicultural marriages/families, special issues involving adopted Asian children, and exclusion and racism within the Asian community.

Some things to consider when working with Asian American clients in counseling; however, remember not to stereotype or generalize

1. Behaviors

a. smiling or laughing "inappropriately" -- may be nervousness or may mean "thank you", "I'm sorry", etc

b. touching -- as with any client, touching needs to be limited and considered carefully as a therapeutic issue. Asian American's generally limit public display of affection and/or appreciation.

c. eye contact -- prolonged eye contact is generally uncomfortable for an Asian American client; for some it may be considered disrespectful.

2. If the client is a refugee, s/he may have experienced many years of war, concentration camps, and persecution. Survival guilt/trauma could be issues.

3. Discover and respect the country the client is from. As noted before, not all Asians are from the same country. Unfortunately, long years of conflict between Asian countries have, in fact, caused some animosity between different Asian cultures. Asians are proud people who appreciate their particular heritage acknowledged correctly.

4. Avoid the use of the term "oriental" which lends toward stereotyping. The terms "asian" and "asian american" are preferred.

5. Asian clients may be coming from very strong "shame based" cultures. As a result there is a stigma attached to receiving counseling services which may need to be overcome.

6. The use of a translator can cause complications in therapy and could interfere in the establishment of a therapeutic relationship. If you must use a translator, consider carefully who you choose for the role. Translators must have

the ability to stay unbiased.

7. When working with children, remember that they may be dealing with intergenerational issues; they are often living in two different worlds.

8. When working with an adult client, get a complete history and consider such issues as his/her generation, is the client connected to his/her community or is s/he isolated, is the client in a bicultural marriage, is there a history of drug or alcohol abuse, is there any depression/suicide history or reports of domestic violence, etc.

9. Lastly, remember that therapy/counseling can be a valuable service and treatment for the Asian American client as s/he struggles with very complex and overwhelming problems and issues.

5/96 Mark Vardell, MA, LPC, LMFT, LCDC

Reference and Suggested Readings:

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Takai, Richard. 1989. *Strangers from a Strange Land*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown.

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A brief note about me: I am a first generation Asian American, migrating to United States in 1962 from Korea. The majority of my childhood was spent in the corn belt of the midwest. During this time I developed a fondness for smorgasbord and realized at some point that we were one of two asian families in the town we lived in... but that is another story. More about me professionally at: <http://www.markvardell.com> .

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