Asian American Young Adult's Cultural Perception toward Suicide and Help-seeking Behaviors

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Purpose of Study

1. Explore cultural perception of suicide among Asian American college students, and

2. Identify risk and protective factors along with their cultural aspects within Asian American cultural context.

3. Identify help-seeking behaviors in order to develop culturally competent suicide prevention programs.
Sample and Research Method

Sample
- 28 Asian American college students from 8 colleges in Chicago Metropolitan area

Research Method
- 5 Focus Group Interview
- 5 Questions
  1. General perception of death
  2. General perception of suicide
  3. Perceived risk factors
  4. Perceived protective factors
  5. Help seeking behaviors
<table>
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<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participants (n=28)</td>
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<td>Average Age</td>
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<td>7 (53.8%)</td>
<td>5 (33.3%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian Indian</td>
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<td>Korean</td>
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<td>English</td>
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<td>Combination</td>
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<tr>
<td>Born outside the U.S.</td>
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<td>Average Years of Living in the U.S.</td>
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Perceptions of Suicide

**Selfish**
[We] have a big responsibility coming from our parents because we are living out our parents’ hopes and dreams --- Suicide is considered so selfish in our culture. Because it’s the easy way out and I think many parents... initially saying like (as if parent speaking) “God gave you life, I sacrificed my life to get you here [the U.S.A.] and to commit suicide is so selfish.” We are giving up on everyone’s dreams. (Asian Indian Female)

**Taboo**
The family is going to try to make up another story...like it wasn’t suicide, it was just an accident...because it’s a taboo (Chinese/Vietnamese Male).
**More empathy toward the surviving family**

I guess I feel bad for them (hypothetical person who committed suicide), but I feel worse for the family and friends who are going to be affected when they are gone. (Pakistani Female)

If they (hypothetical person who committed suicide) were someone close to me I would probably feel guilty like (participant’s name), because you didn’t know about it, you could have helped or prevent it, so I would probably feel guilty about not being there to help. (Chinese Female)

**Guilty**

If they were someone close to me I would probably feel guilty...because you didn’t know about it, you could have helped or prevent it. (Chinese Female)
Risk Factors
Individual Level: Loneliness, Depression and Isolation

I think people usually commit suicide because they think no one cares about them or they think they are the only person that is going through what they are going through. (Chinese female)

- Being left out from certain groups of friends, (which) you thought that they were your true friends but later on you find that they weren’t. --- That’s the reason to people being more depressed and then --- you are broken down, be more depressed, and be more anti-social and leads you to avoid people [and] will play a factor to suicide. (Korean male)

- When you are growing up as an Asian girl or boy, you’re not like the other American kids in your neighborhood and you kind of feel out-casted sometimes. That could be one of the factors that make you to want to commit suicide ---because you are placed in a big high school where you don’t know anyone, or in college where you don’t know anyone, you kind of stick out and you kind of feel lonely. (Filipino female)
My friend that wanted to commit suicide, she felt love from her father [is] conditional. She has to achieve more for him to [make him] love her and she said that is fearful that she would disappoint him..... I think that’s the Chinese American mind, it’s that you know, we brought you over from China, over wherever, over to America and you have all of this college and we’re banking on you to make our family proud, and I think that’s a very big pressure.

(Chinese female)

- It’s like the trophy thing, you know, you always want your trophy to shine the best, you know, like blinding shining. (Asian Indian male)
There are some families that are super strict...like gender roles and it’s like how girls should be and how guys should be.... My grandparents have my life planned out for me. I have to get married by this age, and I have to have grand kids for them at this age, so before they’re dead they [should have] seen their great grand kids. (Korean Female)

Asian parents always compare you to other people. You might be the best at something, but they’re always going to compare you to someone smarter. So that level is always higher and you’re never really good enough. (Pakistani female)

[In abusive situation] you don’t want to call the cops on your parents, you know, because it’s like a disgrace to your family, so you might want to get yourself out of that situation and you might run away, or you might kill yourself. (Pakistani female)
Social and cultural levels: Pressure on model minority myth

It’s not only that going to school is enough. It’s that you uphold your image for your parents. I think a lot of Asian kids, the stereotype is that we are good at science and math, and I think there is pressure if you are not interested in that, or if you are homosexual, or if you are something that is not normal then that is going to be something that is ten times harder to do. (Asian Indian female)

- Being Asian American and if you have grown up in a white community, people think “Oh you’re smart, you’re Asian, you play violin, or piano” and all this other super child kind of thing and if you don’t meet that specific stereotype, then you feel almost out of the loop or not as good as you possibly can be. And that put almost more pressure. And I think that’s almost like an element of control, like if you can’t meet that, then you feel like you can’t achieve anything and that might lead you to be depressed or whatever negative emotion you are going to have. (Filipino female)
Protective Factors
Individual Level: Same Ethnic Friends, Internet access

If we are talking to one of our Hispanic friends or one of our White friends, they might not be able to understand [us], like they might say what are you talking about, you are just over exaggerating, but when you talk to someone that’s been in that situation then you can open up and then you feel better and it wouldn’t lead yourself to be suicidal. (Pakistani Female)

[Since] we are so connected with the internet...your community becomes so much bigger...you can find some other forum or website...I mean, that’s also a good outlet for people who are suicidal, if you don’t have friends to talk to and you can’t talk to your parents, why don’t you talk to people at this forum or website. (Filipino Male)
Family Level: Parent’s higher acculturation level

Because I think the longer you stay here the more Americanized you get. And when that happens, your parents, their priorities are different. They are very much less likely to pressure you about your job or finding a good career. And when that happens, you are no longer stressed about financial things. You are more stressed about personal things. (Chinese male)

- Especially those who are born here because they have more American culture and their parents are more understanding of American culture. If they are more recent immigrants and their kids want to go with the American culture more, then there’s a struggle. (Korean Female)

- Second generation kids, have a lot less pressure than the first generation........they won’t have the same worries. Like that will change the direction of suicide in the future. (Chinese Male)
**Socio cultural Level:**
**Religion, Mentor, Professional counseling services**

It’s not that religion makes you think like “no I can’t kill myself,” but it makes you think I shouldn’t and then you might think it through. I think that if you think about your religion, you might take a second and look at it and maybe decide I do have other options. (Pakistani female participant)

- The perfect person would be able to show you how to adapt to that, the old traditions while living in the new western culture. (Korean male)

- I hated going to a counselor the first month [when I was referred to a school counselor because of my cut] …but [counselor] actually made it mandatory when I went there... and by the end of the year I loved going there. So I think by voicing your emotions, or by stepping up to the plate, like saying “hey are you ok, is there something wrong,” then it does help that person a lot. (Filipino female student)
Help-seeking Behaviors and Prevention Programs

Interested in professional psychotherapy, but want to keep privacy.

- Do not want to be a subject of gossip
- Prefer
  - Group approach - Psycho-educational seminars or workshop
  - Focus on not suicide, but more comprehensive program - “Life skills training”
  - Culturally competent counselors - Who went through same acculturation process
  - Internet, mobile service, hotline service
Although Asian American college students shared similar risk factors of suicide with the non-Asian college students, most significant risk factors in Asian American college students are:

1. culturally bound.
   Parent’s pressure and intergenerational conflict resulted from collectivistic values such as keeping family reputation, obey parental hierarchy, filial responsibility, harmony rather than confront, strict family/cultural rules on gender, and limited open communication with parents

2. associated with stress in acculturation process.
   - Discrepancy in acculturation levels between parents and children
   - Not accepted by parents and isolated from mainstream
   - Negatively impacted by stereotype (i.e. model minority)

3. Asian American’s suicide can be considered as a ‘social act’ which is understood in the context of relationship and cultural values.