

Suicide Among Asian Americans

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What to do when you suspect someone has suicide thoughts?

About 75% of those who die by suicide give warning signs. These include giving away prized possessions, talking about suicide, preparing for death (e.g., writing a will), obtaining the means to die by suicide, depression, changes in personality, social withdrawal, & changes in sleeping or eating patterns.

A national study found that compared to Latinos, Asian Americans with suicidal thoughts were less likely to seek help & perceive a need for treatment.¹¹

If you suspect that someone has suicidal thoughts, ask directly if she/he is considering suicide. If the person says "yes", take it seriously & help her/him obtain professional help.

If you believe a suicide attempt is imminent, do not leave the person alone. Call 911 or a suicide crisis hotline.

Myths about Suicides among Asian Americans

Myth: Asian Americans have higher suicide rates than other racial/ethnic groups.

Fact: The suicide rate for Asian Americans (6.10 per 10,000) is about half that of the national rate (11.5 per 10,000).

Myth: Asian Americans have higher suicide rates than other racial/ethnic groups.

Fact: Asian American college students had a higher rate of suicidal thoughts than White college students but there is no national data about their rate of suicide deaths.

Myth: Young Asian American women (aged 15-24) have the highest suicide rates of all racial/ethnic groups.

Fact: American Indian/Alaskan Native women aged 15-24 have the highest suicide rate compared to all racial/ethnic groups.

Statistics on Asian Americans' Suicide-Related Outcomes

The following information is based on national suicide rates in 2007:^{1,2}

Suicide was the 8th leading cause of death for Asian Americans, whereas it was the 11th leading cause of death for all racial groups combined.

Suicide was the second leading cause of death for Asian Americans aged 15 - 34, which is consistent with the national data (the second leading cause for 15-24 year-olds and the third leading cause for 25-34 year-olds).

Among all Asian Americans, those aged 20 - 24 had the highest suicide rate (12.44 per 100,000).

Among females from all racial backgrounds between the ages of 65 and 84, Asian Americans had the highest suicide rate.

Asian American men had lower suicide rates relative to those of White and American Indian/Alaskan Native men for almost all age groups.

The following information is based on findings from national studies on suicidal thoughts and attempts:

Asian American adults' lifetime rates of suicidal thoughts (8.6%) and attempts (2.5%) were lower than those of national lifetime estimate (13.5% for thoughts, 4.6% for attempts).³

U.S. born Asian American women had a higher lifetime rate of suicidal thoughts (15.9%) than that of the general U.S. population (13.5%).³

Among Asian American adults, those aged 18 -34 had the highest rates of suicidal thoughts (11.9%), intent (4.4%) and attempts (3.8%) compared to other age groups.³

Asian Americans college students were more likely than White American students to have had suicidal thoughts and to attempt suicide.⁴



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Resources

Suicide Awareness and Prevention among Asian Americans

www.sapasianamerican.org/

NY Coalition for Asian American Mental Health

www.asianmentalhealth.org

National Suicide Prevention Hotline

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Asian LifeNet Hotline

1-877-990-8585 (Mandarin, Cantonese, Japanese, Korean, & Fujianese available)

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

<http://www.afsp.org/>

Suicide Prevention Resource Center

<http://www.sprc.org/>

National Institute of Mental Health

www.nimh.nih.gov

Asian American Suicide Prevention and Education

<http://www.aaspe.net/index.html>

Asian American Psychological Association

<http://aapaonline.org>

American Psychological Association

<http://apa.org>

Factors Associated with Suicidal Thoughts & Attempts among Asian Americans

Risk factors

Mental Illness: The presence of depressive and anxiety disorders is one of the best predictors for suicidal thoughts.⁵

Social Factors: Family conflict, viewing oneself as a burden to others, and experiences of discrimination predict increased suicidal thoughts and attempts.^{5,6,7,8}

Chronic Medical Conditions: Men with chronic medical conditions are at greater risk for suicidal thoughts than those without chronic medical conditions.⁶

Protective factors

Ethnic group identification: A strong identification with one's ethnic group is a protective factor against suicide attempts.⁶

Family cohesion and support: Strong family cohesion and parental support are protective factors against suicidal thoughts for adults and adolescents, respectively.^{9,10}

“By seeking professional help, many individuals who have suicidal thoughts are able to resist suicide.” - Joel Wong, Ph.D.

How to Report News About Suicide¹²

Certain ways of reporting news about suicide can encourage “copycat” suicide (i.e., suicide that is motivated by news reports about suicide). To avoid this, journalists should consider the following:

- Avoid glorifying or dramatizing death by suicide, which can encourage “copycat” suicide.
- Avoid using the word, “suicide” in news headlines.

- Avoid reporting the method of suicide, which can encourage individuals to emulate it.
- Refer to the deceased as “having died of suicide”, rather than “having committed suicide.”
- Provide information about help-seeking resources (e.g., crisis hotlines).

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