

## ABSTRACT

- South Asian youth (i.e., ethnicity from nations of Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and/or the Maldivian Islands) in the West comprise a diverse cultural group with unique experiences and vulnerabilities for mental health issues.
- Researchers have found that South Asian youth in the West may experience discrimination as a result of poor acculturation, which can lead to increased stressors (Bhattacharya & Schoppelrey, 2004).
- However, many individuals do not receive services due to a lack of understanding and/or cultural stigma associated with mental health treatment (Sue & Morishima, 1982) and a lack of access to quality mental health resources.
- Taken as a whole, these studies highlight the vulnerabilities and unmet mental health needs of South Asian youth.
- In fact, South Asian youth are largely unrepresented in the psychology literature regarding the mental health of Asian Americans (Inman et al., 2014).
- Given the myriad advantages of early identification and evidence-based mental health treatment, research to help psychologists to *identify* South Asian youth experiencing mental health issues and *connect them to supportive resources* both within schools and in the community is sorely needed.

## BACKGROUND AND CHALLENGES

- South Asian youth experience unique stressors including inter- and intra- community acculturative stress and mental health stigma, which can result in or exacerbate mental health struggles.
- South Asian culture is collectivistic in nature, i.e., subjective experiences, values, and behaviors are organized around one or more collectives, such as family or religious group.
- The identity of South Asians is often defined by group membership and group values are emphasized over individual independence.
- This can present a problem for South Asian Youth in the West as they are from a collectivist culture but are being raised in an individualistic society.
- This type of acculturative stress combined with the macro- and micro-aggressions many South Asian youth face contribute to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety.
- South Asian youth may struggle with:
  - Personal identity and family dynamics including rigid cultural gender roles and norms
  - Biculturalism
  - Feeling "different"
  - Restrictions on autonomy and socializations by family
  - High family expectations of achievement
  - Feelings of guilt and stress associated with immigration issues
  - Discrimination and microaggressions, i.e., "model minority" expectations
  - Intergenerational trauma

# Supporting the Mental Health Needs of South Asian Youth: What School Psychologists Need to Know

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Although mental health concerns are prevalent in the South Asian community, South Asians in the US often express a **greater stigma** towards mental health than other groups which **impedes help-seeking**.

South Asian youth in the US are **at a greater risk for suicidal thoughts and behaviors** than many other minority groups.



## SUPPORTING SOUTH ASIAN YOUTH: TIPS FOR MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDERS

- Engage in holistic, culturally-affirming and strength-based interventions with youth
- Integrate aspects of South Asian culture in education and mental health interventions
- Work to navigate the different value systems of the parent-child dyad while respecting both generations to deliver effective care (Sharma et al., 2020)
- Pursue professional development to learn about South Asian history and culture and help youth and families in their integration from South Asian cultures to Western cultures
- Collaborate with mental health providers in considering the added benefit of family therapy and/or community-based supports in addition to school interventions

## POPULATION-SPECIFIC INTERVENTIONS

Sharma et al. (2020) recommend the following interventions to treat South Asian youth. These recommendations consider the particular challenges South Asian youth face in the West.

- Emphasizing the medical model of illness
- Individual and Group Therapy
- Family Based Interventions
- Community Outreach

## SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- South Asians represent a rapidly growing minority group in the US who are critically underrepresented in the mental health literature
- South Asians represent a unique sub-group of Asian immigrants and, as such, school psychologists, other mental health providers and educators should work to increase their knowledge of cultural factors to support youth and families in schools
- The struggle to maintain a collectivist identity while embracing an American individualistic identity often creates opposing values, which coupled with microaggressions and other stressors, put South Asian youth at high risk for mental health issues (Sharma et al., 2020)

## REFERENCES

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