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Monsoon Asians & Pacific Islanders in Solidarity Community Assessment

Final Report

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Background

With a goal of reducing barriers for Asians and Pacific Islanders (API) to accessing physical and mental health care, Monsoon is in the initial stages of establishing a Community Health Center through its Community Healing Space & Garden Program, which was formed two years ago for victims of gender-based violence and for collaborative community events. To ensure the center's programming is rooted in the strengths and needs of the API community, a community assessment was conducted to bring together the voices of the community and the relevant stakeholders. The community assessment consisted of community listening sessions/focus group discussions and individual interviews, the results of which are presented below.

Methodology

Seven focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted via zoom in July and August 2022 with the intent of assessing the strengths and needs of the API community in Polk County (see Appendix 1 for full interview questions).

FGDs were conducted with:
1. Filipino Elders
2. Adult women ages 19-29 years
3. Adult women ages 30-49 years
4. Adolescent women ages 15-18 years
5. Adult men 19-29 years
6. Adolescent men ages 15-18 years
7. Mothers

Each group had 2-4 individuals, with a facilitator to ensure fluidity of the discussion. All groups were conducted in English, apart from the elders (in both English and Tagalog/Kapampangan). With the consent of the participants, the interviews were recorded. Monsoon Asians & Pacific Islanders in Solidarity contracted the Prevention Research Center for Rural Health to analyze the discussions. Tape recordings were transcribed by rev.com. Coding occurred in NVIVO, and thematic analysis was used to highlight recurrent themes. Thematic analysis was performed both within and across groups.

Report Findings

Overall, 71.4% of the FGD participants, identified as women/cisgender female, 21.4% as men/cisgender males, 3.5% as transgender men/males and 3.5% preferred not to answer. Also, 71.4% identified as heterosexual or straight, 21% identified as LGBTQ+ and the rest did not know or preferred not to answer. The distribution of ages were as follows: 20% less than 18 years of age, 30% were 18-24 years, 10% were 25-34 years, 3% were 35-44 years, 17% were 45-54 years and 13% were 65+ years of age. Over half (53%) of the FGD participants were born in the US, and 40% percent were married. The makeup of the households varied, with 31% having 3 or more adults living in their household. In addition, 59% of households had no children, and 40% had at least one child (17 years or younger) living in the residence. Also, 6.7% reported that they are the primary caregivers for an older adult in their household. Healthcare coverage varied: 57% of FGD participants had a primary care provider, while 27% did not, and 10% did not know whether they

did. When asked to describe their family's financial status as compared to others in their community, 43% stated that their financial status was the same as other families like them in their community, while 10% said they were worse off, and 17% that they were better off that financially than other families like them in their community with the rest not knowing or noting they preferred not to answer.

Broad Themes

Diversity within the API Community

The API community is rich with diversity, and each individual has a multitude of identities that intersect with the monolithic idea of what it is to be Asian-American. The experiences of age, gender, sexual orientation, birthplace, and ethnicity shaped the conversation and influenced the spaces that each individual feels most comfortable in. Two subthemes emerged, one more internal to the API community, and one more external.

Subtheme 1: API Diversity – From the Inside

As defined by the Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence, the term Asians and Pacific Islanders (API) is a blanket term designed to capture the views and experiences of individuals from more than 50 culturally distinct ethnic groups[1]. Whilst this broad pan-ethnic classification can give individuals a sense of community, the diversity of the community ensures that individual experiences can be as different as they are alike. Participants in the FGD noted that many axes of diversity exist within the API community, some that came as a surprise for them. API community members differed based on whether they were born in the US or outside the U.S., identified as Asian or Pacific Islanders or their individual ethnolinguistic group, spoke the API language or not, spoke English or not, had arrived in the US some time ago or more recently, were from one country or another, among other differences mentioned.

> *"I feel like there are a lot of factors to think about too, because I have two friends that grew up in Vietnam and then they moved over, and they don't necessarily put heavy traditions on, but I don't know. I think it varies from household to household because I think my family really respects that, like you have to respect your elders and stuff, and they hold a lot of tradition still. Whereas my girlfriend's family whose Viet, they're very relaxed about it and is really different even though we're both Vietnamese Americans. And then I've been over to a friend's house who grew up in Vietnam and I don't know, I don't think I see much of a divide maybe because they moved over to America pretty early too. But I think a lot of it is how their parents decide whether to uphold it and raise them on that culture or not." (Adult women ages 19-29 years)*

> *"I'm connected with other Hawaiians within the state. And Hawaiians are a little bit different in that you can be Kama'Aina, which means you're from Hawaii, or you can be Kanaka, which is you're ethnically Hawaiian, or you can be both. So, we're all over the board. So, there's certainly people that are transplants that moved to Iowa from Hawaii. There's some of us who were born and raised here. I've never lived in Hawaii, but ethnically I'm Hawaiian. So, we're a different when you look at the large umbrella*

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[1] Census Data & API Identities. Asian Pacific Institute on Gender Based Violence Website. (2022, March 8). Retrieved August 15, 2022, from https://www.api-gbv.org/resources/census-data-api-identities/

of API, Hawaiians can be a little different based upon how people just want to identify themselves. So, I do what I can to stay connected, and then also just educate people, many of whom know nothing accurate about Hawaiian culture." (Mothers)

Additionally, because of the diversity of the community, programming or services that may benefit some API individuals, might not be comfortable or suitable for others. In the following example, an interviewee explained how international students did not find the same solace in Asian-American student groups, and instead felt they could relate better to others with similar lived experiences.

> *"For me, I have definitely seen firsthand that divide. I know VSA (Vietnamese Student Association), there's actually another Vietnamese Student Association, but it's specifically for international students. And you would think that VSA would interact a lot with VISA (Vietnamese International Student Association), which is the international students, but we've never interacted with them, and we've never reached out. And I think within the Asian community, there's this invisible divide between international students and then students that have grown up and have really only known that American society and cultural norms.*
>
> *And so, with that, I remember my friend who's Vietnamese and he's from Vietnam, here as an international student. He went to VSA for the first time, and he was like, "You guys are all speaking English. I don't know what's going on. I thought we would talk about our culture, talk more about our traditions and all these things." And that really got me thinking about how in VSA and other Asian organizations, we don't really talk much about our upbringing, we don't talk much about traditions and culture, which I feel like we really should focus on. And because we don't, we spend most of the time just talking to each other, having fun activities. But if we don't include what's really bringing us together, which is our culture background, then it excludes people that are seeking that who may be feeling homesick because I think every college student does, and especially more so for international students.*
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> *So, you would think that these spaces would be a place for us to gather and come together. But I think with these organizations that has, in my opinion, maybe even created a bigger divide because my friends that are international students feel uncomfortable going to meetings because they feel like they won't belong, they feel like they won't get along with people and won't really mesh well because there's that kind of behavioral differences between the two groups" (Adult women 19-29 years)*

This was echoed by adult women in the mothers FGD:
> *I would add that as a Korean American Adoptee … There is a barrier to us even feeling like we have a place in the API community, because we don't have that cultural background. We don't have the language. We don't have the food and the community and all those things. So even getting to college and wanting to be in the Asian American Coalition, there's always this thing about, but do I even get to do that? Do I belong to that because I'm not. You hear this a lot that we're not real Asians. So not have that background makes, I think, can feel disqualifying for a lot of us. (Mothers)*

Subtheme 2: The Consequences of an External Monolithic and Americentric view of the API Community

Additionally, the perception of the API community as a uniform culture can have negative effects when this is perpetuated by society. Several interviewees discussed the burden of the model minority myth, and the way that this impacts their opportunities and can feel burdensome in many ways.

> *"I'd like to say throughout school, I feel like we are very underrepresented, things like Science Bound exclude just Asians and all. A lot of Southeast Asians come from immigrated families who don't have the same opportunities that other parts of Asia may have, they're a lot more developed. "(Adult women 19-29 years)*

> *"And sometimes you have to take your own kind of hardship and experiences that hurt and spin it in a way that's like, okay, it made me better. It's not something that ... makes me human, almost make me sort of an inspiration to other people ... And so, I think that there's a lot of this idea that you have to be very stoic, very strong, very professional through a lot of your daily life, just because you're this ... the model minority, I hate to bring it up, but it's still kind of a thing, especially in professional settings. (Adult men 19-29 years)*

One group discussed the impact that the Americentric historical education has on the external view of the API community, and the subsequent cultural erasure this can cause.

> *"I can speak for Hawaiian. We are on everyone's bucket list to go on vacation, and that's about all they want to know and care to know about Hawaiian. So, it's quite mind blowing when I talk to any age. I mean, this summer I was at a nursing home, and I also spoke with elementary kids or not elementary, high school aged kids. When I asked them does anybody know how Hawaii became the 50th state, nobody knows. And I'm like that's pretty sad, because it's US history, and you have no idea. And so many people have no clue that the indigenous people, that their kingdom was overthrown by the US government and that many would love to still be a sovereign nation. And that it's more than a beautiful, sunny place for you to take a vacation. So, I would say for Hawaiians in particular, and I could probably lump in other Pacific Islanders as well, people know absolutely nothing. Or they know Jason Momoa. That's about it." (Mothers)*

> *"I'll just talk about the Vietnamese American community or what it feels like people would know of us. I think that non-Vietnamese only understand Vietnamese people if it's connected to the Vietnam War. And so, they see us often, and especially in Iowa as only refugees, boat people. I don't think there's much else apart from that, so a lot of the conversations I have with Iowans revolve around the war. Right? And so, it's whatever. Our history has to be connected to the history of Americans here but understanding that people and the culture of Vietnamese is very little." (Mothers)*

Underrepresented Voices

FGD participants also noted whose voices are missing in the API community. LGBTQIA+ individuals, individuals with disabilities, young men, and Pacific Islanders were discussed as groups that might be forgotten about, or that could benefit from safe spaces to connect with their community.

> *"Speaker 1: I feel Islanders are not very well known. I feel their voices aren't heard as much.*

Speaker 2: I agree. I just feel when you think of Asian, people only think of the more prominent races or the more prominent ethnicities, like Korean or Japanese. They don't think of the Pacific Islanders.

Speaker 3: Yeah, definitely agree. I also want to bring up the LGBTQ plus community and I want to say the disabled community as well. I think these two groups are also often forgotten and we very rarely hear their voices because we don't ever create spaces for them." (Adolescent women ages 15-18 years)

Also, there is a risk that API community elders can also be unintentionally excluded from the community, especially when a language barrier is present.

"Interviewer: You say that the elder community is a little bit forgotten? Are there barriers that keep them from being known or heard more?

Speaker 1: I think it's the big language barrier there is at times, because I know, speaking from personal experience again, a lot of my elders, and they're not really familiar with the English, and as well as a lot of them struggle with English still. And they've been in America for over 30, 40 years. It's also the difference and us not teaching the older generation about, this is how you do things. And then this is now, and then this has changed, and just society changing as a whole and not teaching our elderly anything, or any changes." (Adolescent men ages 15-18 years)

Intergenerational Communication: Importance and Challenges

Every one of the FGDs discussed how communication between generations is nuanced in regard to culture, tradition, and respect. The youth discussed communication with their parents, and the parents with their children. Both groups expressed a desire to communicate and connect, but a difficulty in practice.

The youth expressed the need for judgement-free communication with their elders. They discussed how they are not comfortable discussing certain topics for fear of ridicule, and thus prefer to turn to peers, siblings, or an online community for support.

"Yeah. I think this generation, or the kids, the first gen, I think they've done a lot better at communicating with each other and being there for each other most likely probably because the traditions aren't as of high standards and we're more open to talking and supporting each other because we don't feel like we're weak when we open up or talk about our concerns. And they know better than most people because they grew up in the same household as you or with you. But yeah, I think if you were to open up to maybe the older generations, like I've experienced mocking or them claiming we're weak because we think different or believe in different stuff than them." (Adult women ages 19-29 years)

The young people also discussed the importance of respect within their culture, and how those influences and challenges their communication with their elders. They expressed the desire to have challenging conversations, but the inability to do so for fear of disrespecting the opinions and beliefs of those senior to them.

"I think previously [A2] mentioned hierarchy in cultures. And for me, especially that, resonates a lot because growing up there was always this rule that elders can say no wrong, and what they say is fact and you can't disagree with it or else it's considered disrespectful. And when I was younger, I was a very rebellious kid. And so, I would always stand up for myself and I wouldn't be scared to talk back, but it was never in a disrespectful manner, it was always just standing up for myself. And for my family, it was a really big shock to them because they saw that as such a big disrespectful thing to even just say anything back to a parent other than, "Yes. Okay. Yes. I'm sorry. That's my bad. I'm in the wrong." And to stray from that pattern, it's really hard for the older generation, at least in my experience, to understand that it's okay for younger people to say how they feel and it's okay to be wrong really. But for me, I've noticed that it's really hard to have an open conversation with the older generation because there is that idea of disrespect between younger and older generations." (Adult women ages 19-29 years)

In return, the older interviewees expressed a desire to connect with the youth, but a frustration with the differences in communication styles, and the lack of respect for the traditional way.

And then the next step to that our generation, and we have kids here. And we're stuck in between the older generation, how our dad and how our parent raised us. And then now we as a parent here and try to raise the kid that born here and all this stuff, so we are just kind of mingle in between. It's like, okay. And we try to raise them in the old way, but it's not working because they don't know how to follow that. And then we are frustrating because they're not listening. They go doing their new things here, that's the way they know how, things like that. (Adult women ages 30-49 years)

"And now I want to teach my son to be more respectful, more polite, more humble just like how I grew up. But then in his school, that's not going to happen. When he get bullied, he had to stand up for himself. So, he has to learn to navigate things by himself, and it is kind of hard for me in terms of how I can give him the support that he needs, because all these things are new to me. I didn't go to school here. He's going to go to middle school soon. And what is it like to be a middle schooler? I don't know. How do I interact with his friends who are teenagers, something like that? So that's one of the biggest challenges that I have." (Mothers)

Some of the younger parents are trying to bridge that communication gap and have the uncomfortable but important discussions with their children that their parents did not with them.

"For me, I have continued conversations with my children all the time, reassuring them and making them feel confident in who they are, they know different skin colors. And they'll tell me, "My friend, she's a little darker than me." I said, "That's fine. She has two eyes, two hands, two feet, she's just like you, she wants to be your friend, you want to be her friend." So, it's just like really having that communication with my children in a way that my parents did not." (Adult women ages 30-49 years)

The 30–49-year-old group noted that they often struggle with communication in both directions: with their parents, and with their children.

Supporting and facilitating the communication between generations seems to be key to allowing families to connect on a level that they are seeking, whilst also fostering respect between the differing communication styles.
"...open communication between generations is also very important." (Adolescent males, 15-18 years)

Importance of Connections to Family, Community and Culture

Overall, it was clear that connection throughout the community is very important to every individual we spoke to. Through whatever avenue they could, individuals sought out connections with others who share their lived experiences. Some utilized online spaces, others found connection through organizations, and everyone relied on their friends and family.

> *"Yeah, I feel there's not enough connection in our AAPI community as I'm not too familiar with a lot of the other AAPI races, and ethnicities, and cultures that are out here in Polk County. I'm only aware of actually a small few, and I like to see the Asian community, AAPI, all of them come together and then advocate or work together to solve these problems we see as problems and come up with solutions." (Adolescent men ages 15-18 years)*

The creation of spaces that foster this connection were widely requested. The ability to find solace in shared experiences and create a judgement free space is valued across all generations.

> *"I think that community talking spaces are super great and it's one of the reasons that got me into being open to talk about it. I remember going to [inaudible] an event where we had discussions. All these discussions on mental health, feminism, or I guess, Asian communities and their lives. These are just things that I never spoke about before. Just having that space where everyone has an understanding that this is a safe space, we can share these ideas or we can talk about our experiences without being judged, was really, really helpful. Not only that, it also allowed me to put my own experiences into words because in the past, I felt maybe I was the only one facing this, but in turn, when I shared this with my friends, they were like, "Oh, no, I also experienced something similar." (Adolescent women ages 15-18 years)*

The older women also discussed the importance of encouraging API community members to connect more with their community and involving more people in community events. Creating an active network of support helps individuals in the community who may not have family around, or who may be seeking a space to commune and build relationships.

> *"For me, I think what I could do is to try to get more people in my generation to be more proactive in helping the community, because within the Cambodian community, everyone knows [S], because she's so helpful and friendly and always there at events. And I think we need to see more people in our generation carrying the torch pretty much, passing on the traditions and also just helping other people who may need help, whether it be translation, or providing resources, or transportation, I think, getting the younger generation more involved." (Adult women ages 30-49 years)*

For some individuals who were adopted or whose parents' emphasized assimilation over cultural appreciation, returning to their cultural roots and ensuring their children do the same is a priority.

> *"I don't have Korean culture because I didn't grow up with it. I grew up on a hog farm with white parents who adopted me who didn't make a point or didn't know themselves how to connect me with Korean culture or Korean Americans, Asian Americans at all. Solon was population of 1,000 people, 80s and 90s. So, raising (daughter's name), my daughter, I don't have that cultural*

background to share with her. So, I'm hoping that we can kind of learn together, but I can teach her what it is to be Asian American and to be in mostly white spaces and to be racially different. And that's something that I definitely didn't have any kind of guidance around or preparation for." (Mothers)

This connection to culture expands to also sharing culture: Several people spanning all the interviewed generations mentioned the desire to share and celebrate their culture with the broader Iowa population and wished for more events that showcased the diversity and richness of the API community. Food, music, song, and dance were mentioned as specific avenues to celebration and happiness within the community.

"For me, it would have to be celebrating culture. I know Iowa has a thing called the Asian Fest, which it's okay. But when I went to California, I don't remember what town it was called, but they had a whole street blocked off for it. And they had dragon dancing in the street, and it was just like I was in awe. And I just wish that more of that would come to Iowa. I know our Asian community is a lot smaller here than it is out in California, so I get why we have the Asian Fest, and they have a celebration like that. But that stuff makes me happy because I married someone who is white and has no idea what Asian culture is. So, it makes me proud to represent who I am and who we are and have them see our culture and stuff. So that makes me happy"
"And along with that, I also really enjoy sharing music and listening to music, especially Vietnamese music because I was always so ashamed and embarrassed of Vietnamese music growing up because my mom would always blast Geelong music, which is very traditional music while I have all my white friends there and I'm just like, "Okay, this is very embarrassing." But now as I'm older, I realize how important music is to my culture and how important it is to me now. And so, I'm glad I get to be at the point of my life where I really get to enjoy that and I'm able to share with others too." (Adult women ages 19-29 years)

Agency and Independence

In addition to the importance of connection, participants also voiced a desire for individual agency throughout the interviews. Participants spoke of instances in which more information could better help the community serve itself. This was discussed generally, but also specifically in the context of elderly individuals who are often reliant on their children. Having a centralized place where individuals can go to seek support and information to help them be active participants in their own care is critical.

"(re elders) It's also the difference and us not teaching the older generation about, this is how you do things." (Adolescent males)

Additionally, many members of the Elderly populations do not speak English well, and this provides a barrier to healthcare and accessing services. Having to rely on an interpreter creates a barrier, especially in small tight-knit communities- translating sensitive matters for people you know can put the interpreter in an uncomfortable spot.

"For me, I think having access to… Especially the elders, they don't speak English as well. So maybe having a resource or go-to place where they can have a better understanding of, when they need help, when they need services, a lot of times they rely on their kids and stuff like that, so it's really frustrating for them. So maybe, I don't know, having, I don't know, a central place where we can build a database or like

information or pamphlet where we can have it in different language. And then we can give that to the elder generations, I think they will feel more or less stressful when there's a need for anything." (Adult women ages 30-49 years)

In the interview with the Filipino elders, they also mentioned that a technology workshop or class would be beneficial to them, as they lack basic computer skills that create barriers in various areas of their lives. They mentioned that banking, healthcare, and news are all areas that require tech know-how and therefore exclude some of the community elders.

"Maybe, in your office, people can go to learn how to use tech. A workshop re tech, social media. Workshop for elders. Basic Tech. Like for instance, you went to your doctor, if you know the app, they can get health information. How they will know their health history. How to use the cellphone? Apps on your cellphone." (Filipino Elders)

What Constitutes a Healthy Community?

The participants were asked what they believe constitutes a healthy community, or what they envisioned for a healthy community.

Responses garnered a lot of insight into the things people held most important and are listed below.

I'd say a healthy community has opportunities for support, whether it's food, or shelter, or clothing (Adult women ages 19-29 years)
For me, I think a healthy community is a lot of just being able to lean on each other, that communication, being able to gather like [D] said. That to me, I feel like a really good way to build that healthy community, because if we can take care of each other, we can take care of ourselves too. (Adult women ages 19-29 years)
I think a lot of it has to do with open communication, being able to point out the things that you need to improve on as well as having the resources to address those issues (Adult women ages 19-29 years)
I feel a healthy community is no hate. I think that's it, to be honest (Adolescent women ages 15-18 years)
I'd say a healthy community is where we could all feel welcome with no judgment or no hate. Just to be around each other without feeling scared of other people's opinion because of how they see things differently. (Adolescent women ages 15-18 years)
I think being able to speak up and having the ability to have a space for your voice and others, as well. To be able to comfortably talk about an issue is one way which I think could build a healthy community. Also, having the ability to go to someone when you need help when you're struggling with something (Adolescent women ages 15-18 years)
I think just having a support system for the community that goes hand-in-hand with what the support mean for the communities, would it be interpretation services available, like resources for elders, even resources for younger generations who maybe even need help with college stuff or go going forward to elders who need help with social security stuff (Adult women ages 30-49 years)
We can get together, we can start simple like gatherings and then getting to know each, if there is a newcomer, you can act as resource person in your own way.

Helping how they can navigate in the new community. So, that is how I envision a good community. Also, suppose you have an elderly friend, support finding out what she needs and on time of COVID, and she is not able to go out, and if you can pick up groceries for her. Those are just examples. (Filipino Elders)
In the Filipino culture, that is what is called the "bayanihan" spirit. Where we are supporting each other in the community. We were fortunate to be home in the Philippines not too long ago to see how the communities in Dasmarinas, Cavite, the barangays are important there. They are respectful and friendly. They are using "opo" and they are speaking more in Tagalog. Not a lot in English. Especially the young people. "How are you?" "Always po"   So, the vision is let's all come back as one. We are so divided. (Filipino Elders)
One where our voice is representing in government and politics, as well as through events and community-building activities. (Adult makes 19-29 years)
One vision is that the people that need the most help get the help they need. (Mothers)

Issues Facing the API Community

"I think a lot of API live on the margins. A lot of us need help. A lot of people are low income. There are people in domestic abuse and sexual violence situations. We have new immigrants and refugees who are especially vulnerable. We have a lot of issues. There's LGBTQ, our youth. There's a need for safe spaces. There's a need for visibility. There's a need for a voice. There's a need for representation in all systems. And so, for me, a vision for a healthier API community would address all of those things." (Mothers)

Subtheme 1: Mental Health

Every demographic group cited mental health as the biggest health concern within their community. Culturally, mental health is stigmatized, and often spoken about strictly in terms of mental illness, or not spoken about at all. Most individuals mentioned that mental health is acknowledged as something that happens to other people, but never to their own family.

"I would also say mental health, especially because it's not really something that's talked about a lot in a family. So, if you don't talk about it in a family, oftentimes people feel scared to talk about it with their friends. And I also remember reading how there's a really high suicide rate in Asian students, especially at the college level because there is such a big weight put on the shoulders of Asian students because of family values for education or even the idea of wanting to make your parents proud because of all the sacrifices they've been through. And as a first generation, we talked about earlier, there is that heavy weight of wanting to make your family proud, wanting to make sure all this money that we're spending is going to be spent wisely. And so when there's that weight on your shoulder and you're not able to go to other people and talk about it, or if you don't feel comfortable or you feel like there's really nowhere to escape, it ends up being a really big issue that is often not talked about in the Asian community." (Adult women ages 19-29 years)

In the older generations, stoicism is viewed as a form of strength, and so struggles and emotion are dealt with internally. The younger generations acknowledge the strength their elders have shown, but many commented on the impact that the unresolved trauma has had intergenerationally.

> *"I think a negative is that they're very non-communicating. They never like to talk about their struggles or share and try to find others alike, they just internalize it. And it really gets you to notice how strong they are and with all that they had to withstand. But at the same time, it would've been nice if they had help, or support, or they reached out to someone. Because a lot of these Asians just deal with a lot of trauma and they never really get a chance to let it go, they just have to keep on fighting and just carrying it with them. And sometimes, they end up repeating the same things that happened to them just because they never got over it." (Adult women ages 19-29 years)*

> *"Mental health for me is sometimes not talked about in my family at all. I don't think we ever had a conversation about mental health anytime. So, for me, that makes it a lot harder to talk about my mental health, talk to other people about my mental, because I just don't know how to. I something we've never discussed. We never even thought about it, I guess. And just the cynicism behind the like, 'Oh you have to suck it up and move on,' type of thing, but sometimes you have to let it out and tell other people. Getting to that point, for me, was very difficult because my family never talked about mental health." (Adult males, 19-29 years)*

One individual explained that in order to parent in a way that respected her children's mental health, she had to reframe her mindset and the way that she was raised culturally to view mental health.

> *"I didn't understand, when we grew up, we always want to go to school, we always want to do a good job, we want to get good grades, we want to get a job, we want to have everything that we want, and we work hard for it. And then when our kids come, I feel like they just don't want to do anything, even school. And then I'm like, are they lazy or what? What is going on? I don't understand. Am I supposed to discipline them hard? What's my next step here and stuff like that. So, they just want, want, want.*
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> *And then sometimes people will give you advice like, oh, you're too easy on them, blah, blah, blah, and you should go hard on them. And then if you try to go very hard on them, then they break down and all that stuff. So, these days I don't know how easy it is to get help or get access to help with the mental health issues, especially in the Asian community. Are your kids crazy or what's going on? It's just stuff like that. And I think we need to be touch more on mental health in the Asian community, understanding mental health, the kids are not crazy, it's just very frustrating for them, they are going through a tough time, and we don't understand that.*
>
> *We think it's just so easy. When I was young, it was just easy. If I want something, I just go to work and I just buy it. For them, they're frustrated, they don't know what to do. And then as a parent, I can't connect with them. It's like, why are you so frustrated and things like that? So, I think when there's a time for you to get help, counseling or whatever between family and stuff like that. And I think within the Asian community, we need to do more in that mental health and that family counseling and things like that to just save you a lot from your heartache and your own health as a parent." (Adult women ages 30-49 years)*

Overall, the community could benefit from increased awareness of mental health, increased access to mental health services, and healthy outlets to express themselves and speak openly about the issues they are facing internally. Access to healthcare providers who can relate to, or share similar experiences is

particularly important to bridge the cultural barrier to care. Having to explain cultural phenomena to a provider can be an added mental burden to an already struggling patient.

> *"What I envision is more, say more professionals who are AAPI, because I feel as if you are talking to somebody who's the same race as you or near the same race as you, you'll feel more open to them and the more connected to them, rather than sharing with somebody who has no connection to you other than talking to them. And as well as making it a lot easier to reach for help, ask for help, and receive help. Once again, it's really hard to receive those things I feel, as AAPI."* (Adolescent men ages 15-18 years)

> *"I'd say mental health and treatment. But mental health and maybe treatment modalities are aren't Western influenced."* (Mothers)

> *I think it hard enough to access mental healthcare and then to be a person of color of top of it in a place where people aren't well versed and education and prepared to talk to you about racial trauma and stress and understand cultural differences, all those things."* (Mothers)

Subtheme 2: Racism and Stigma

Historically, and exacerbated in recent years by the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals in the API community have faced various forms of racism and stigma, perpetuated by harmful stereotypes and beliefs. Several people mentioned the burden of the model minority myth, and the way that impacts their access to opportunities traditionally extended to disadvantaged population groups.

> *"I don't think racism absent Asians has even <u>not</u> been normalized. If you look throughout history, it's almost always been perpetrated. And then if the entire model minority myth, sort of is another way to be racist towards Asians. So, I feel in recent years, it's been a lot more prevalent and heightened for sure. And instead of it being more covers, just snarky comments, or motions with pulling their eyes up sort of thing, it's been more hateful comments. I don't think that this has not just bene normalized.* (Adolescent males, 15-18 years)

Several examples of racism and stigma were discussed throughout the interviews, including:
- Stigma in healthcare and mental health diagnoses
- Stereotypes about educational capabilities and affinities
- Dismissive comments and attitudes towards concern around Asian hate crimes
- Negative views of Pacific Islander communities
- Mocking of personal characteristics such as names, accents, or behaviors
- Sexual fetishism of Asian women
    > *"So, when I first came to the US, I was 11 and I started sixth grade. The middle school that I went to, they did not test me on my proficiency in the English language, they just put me in the ESL program. But they offered to have me skip a grade or two because of my performance in both math and science. Actually, looking back, they did not even have me test my math and science skills, they just offered to do that to me. They just assumed that I would be really great at math and science when actually, my background originally was in the arts and humanities. So anyways."* (Adult women ages 30-49 years)

Many of the focus group participants already mentioned that they were one of few API individuals in their area, and incidences of racism contribute to further social isolation and cultural erosion. The impacts of such biases have long lasting and generational effects- several young people said they were not encouraged to speak their first language because their parents were afraid, they would develop an accent, or that they were embarrassed by aspects of their upbringing.

> *"It's mostly Filipino and English for me, but I also experience a very similar kind of ridicule with a dialect called Bisaya. My family use Bisaya. And my mom raised me to only speak in either Filipino or English so that I wouldn't have a hard time in school like she did when she was younger because her Filipino classmates ridiculed her for having a very thick accent, which she developed from speaking the Bisayan dialect for a long period of time. But because I grew up in a household of Bisayans, my Filipino sounds really funny, but yeah, anyway." (Adult women ages 30-49 years)*

Subtheme 3: Sexual Health and Reproductive Education

When discussing health with the young women, the topic of sexual reproductive health came up several times. Similarly, to mental health, API women reported that their families often avoid discussing sex or sexual health issues unless it is in the context of abstinence. Without conversations around consent, healthy sex, and healthy interpersonal relationships, young women are left vulnerable to assault and unhealthy relationships.

> *"I also wanted to say that the second issue would be sexual abuse because [A] had touched based earlier, we're not being talked to about sex. We're not being educated on like, if someone were to touch me here or there, that's bad. So, I feel like growing up, if we were personally getting sexually abused, we don't know that that's something bad going on until much later on, but then it's too late and you don't know how many times it's been done to somebody else. So that would be the second major issue in my opinion." (Adult women ages 30-49 years)*

Additionally, the women touched on the fetishism of young Asian girls, and how that impacted them growing up. The failure of the community to support young women who report instances of sexual harassment allows that behavior to be perpetuated and normalized.

> *"I guess before, when I was 13, 14, 15, I never understood this, but sexualizing, straight up sexualizing Asian girls, apparently is a thing. When I was younger, I never understood it. And then when I was older, my friends and I would experience it. When you report it, it's like a stigma. People are like, "No, that didn't really happen. That's not the way how it happened." It's a stigma talking about whether these things happened or not. You would think that it's maybe some childish person talking about these kinds of things, but then when you find out it's actual adults in their forties saying these kinds of things to you, it's just very uncomfortable and shocking." (Adolescent women ages 15-18 years)*

The importance of engaging young API men in discussions about SRH was also emphasized. The lack of familial discussion goes both ways- educating young men on consent, and what it means to have boundaries with your partner helps to reduce interpersonal violence and foster healthy relationships.

> *"I think something I wanted to mention was, back around 2019, 2020, there was a very big movement that really shook the Asian community and especially the Asian-Greek*

community, which was, a lot of sexual assault allegations were coming out within Asian frats and their members assaulting other Asian women within their own communities. And so, I think for me at least, I really want to call on the Asian men in our community to call out their friends, and to inform themselves, and to learn about consent, learn about what it means to have boundaries with your partner, learn what all the basics of interpersonal relationships and what it really means to hold those." (Adolescent women ages 15-18 years)

It was also discussed how the above gaps in knowledge have the potential to further affect API youth in light of the recent challenges to women's reproductive rights.

"Sexual education among the API youth, low. Condom use, low. Birth control use besides, I might hold back on that statistic. I might be wrong on that, but there's a lot for us in terms of sexual health to be better at, to improve, have access to. So, all that is connected to reproductive justice. And so, I see this as a woman. I see this as an advocate. There are definitely challenges and barriers there for API women. Those who are poor, immigrant, those who are in abusive relationships who are forced to have children that they cannot take care of. Forcing someone to carry a pregnancy is a form of gender-based violence, and we do see that among some of the survivors that we assist" (Mothers)

Subtheme 4: Homophobia and Transphobia

Several individuals in the focus groups identified as members of the LGBTQIA+ community and shared their experiences with feeling unrepresented and unheard. Culturally, homophobia is still rooted in the API community, and queer individuals can find themselves ousted from their communities or families when they come out. In one instance, a young woman shared that her whole family was shunned from their church due to her identity.

"I feel like the queer community is very unheard from because homophobia is very rooted in families and it gets passed on, not necessarily saying the children themselves are homophobic, but that's what they're used to and how much the LGBTQ community is mocked in Asian culture. The first time I found out the word for gay in Viet was in a Perry by Night skit. And I had asked my parents what that meant, and my mom said that meant gay, and what they were showing was just this dude who had made a really feminine voice and was acting on girly and stuff and they're just laughing and stuff." (Adolescent women ages 15-18 years)

Subtheme 5: Representation

The issue of lack of representation was noted throughout several of the focus group discussions. Lack of representation was mentioned in government, in school curricula, in the media, in health/mental health care professionals, in all systems (see quote at the beginning of this section on Issues facing the API community).

"I'd like to see more representation. Just more things that represent the Asian community and that we're here, we have a voice, and we want to be heard." (Adolescent males, 15-18 years)

"I think just having an Asian face in the community with something to … in the public face…. Something that would really help the community, just to give something that we

can point to or something that we can all relate to or talk about in the public space when we're discussing issues within the government … Just having someone that looks like us and understanding where we're coming from is something that would really benefit the community." (Adult males, 19-29 years)

One of my things is I found a pediatrician who's Asian American in Iowa City. And that's really important to me because I can't control who her teachers are. I can't control a lot of the adults she's seeing around her. But yeah, trying to get the most face time with people who look like us. I've never lived in a place where its majority Asian, and she probably never will either. So, yeah, if she could grow up without that expected kind of shame of being no-white in Iowa, I would be really happy if that could happen." (Mothers)

Something that has brought me joy in the past couple of years has been seeing more representation in the media. … It's just so exciting to think that my kid will have so much more representation and be able to see herself on the screen…. I hope that her generation, my daughter's generation will just automatically be better than we were in the ear of Friends and whatever." (Mothers)

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the FGDs, several recommendations can be made to promote health and wellbeing of API communities.

1. **Community spaces/talking groups for various identity groups within the API community**.
   a. Along with general spaces to connect and gather, groups specific to various populations provide a needed space to connect on shared experiences, and to provide peer psychosocial support.
   b. The youth indicated that online spaces are beneficial for connecting through humor, and for finding people outside of your geographic to relate to.
   c. Spaces for discussion between the generations, to bridge the communication gap and foster understanding.
2. **Continued attention to sexual reproductive health education and interpersonal violence**.
   a. Spaces for young women to discuss and learn about SRH issues, and spaces to include young men in the discussion.
   b. A campaign to increase awareness and call attention to the fetishization of young API women, and the impact this has.
3. **Fostering and promoting Monsoon as a place of welcome and advocacy for the LGBTQIA+ community**, with attention to shifting cultural norms around the diversity of sexual and gender orientation.
4. **Provision of resources that promote self-sufficiency.**
   a. Improved language resources
   b. Generally, support with system and resource navigation
      i. Several of the adults discussed the need for resources to help educate the community on how to serve itself, how to find and secure available resources, how to navigate the financial side of the healthcare system, and where to go for support with social security. With increased community education and advocacy, people will feel more empowered to utilize available services.
   c. Tech workshops for the elderly

5. **Programmatic attention to mental health issues.**
    a. The community could benefit both from increased awareness of the mental health continuum, access to general mental health community-based preventive programs as well as mental health clinical services, and culturally specific services to address the impacts of intergenerational trauma.
6. **Expand the advisory board.**
    a. Finish development and recruitment of the youth advisory board (Circle of Wisdom).
    b. Consider ways to continue to hear diverse voices of the API community, including expansion of board membership and/or guest speakers/attendees at board meetings.
7. **Develop a communication campaign to highlight the diversity of the API community.** Part of this campaign could include community events to celebrate API culture**.**
8. **Advocate for greater representation of the API community in all systems.** Plan strategically to increase representation of the API community. Some ideas could includ**e** supporting API candidates in government, providing educational scholarships to support API individuals to enter professions that are under-represented by the community, etc.

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

General Questions:
1. What is your vision for a healthy community?
2. How is the API community viewed by others?
3. What experiences of stigma have you encountered? (In health care, in the community, at school)
4. What are the most beneficial services for this community?
   a. Follow-up: What are the barriers to accessing services that are needed?
5. What are the most serious health issues facing this community?
6. How does the API community cope with challenges? (Both positive / negative coping strategies)/ emotional and cognitive coping strategies?
7. What are the mental health concerns in the community? Where do people get support to cope with mental health issues?
8. How prepared was the API community for the COVID-19 pandemic?
   a. What could be one differently to be more prepared for another emergency or future disasters?
   b. What groups were left out of preparedness plans?
9. Who is forgotten in your community? Whose voice is not heard?
10. What influences your quality of life? What influences your happiness?
11. What action is most needed to support API communities? What do you need to thrive?
12. What do you believe are the 2-3 most important issues that must be addressed to improve health and quality of life in your community?
13. Thinking about the future, if you could do one thing to improve the wellbeing of people in your community, what would it be?

Population Group Specific Questions:
1. What are the challenges that are faced by API youth/API older adults/API LGBTQIA+/API parents?
2. Specific for Expectant Parents: Are expectant parents getting the care they need in the API community?
3. Specific to Parents/Mothers/Caregivers: How are children cared for in the API community? (childcare) What are childcare needs in the community?
4. Specific for Youth Group: How do different generations communicate with each other? What are the issues of strengths in that communication? What are the issues of tension in that communication?

Closing question:
Is there anything you would like to add about the API community and the wellbeing of its members that we should know and have not asked about?

GENERAL PROBES
General probes to be used as appropriate.
● Would you say a little more about what you mean?
● Would you explain further?
● Has anyone had a similar or different experience?
● Would you give me an example of what you mean?
● Would anyone else want to comment here?
● Can you tell me more about?