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A newsletter for Asian American parents & children

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Bullying Prevention for Asian and Asian American Youth: Do's and Don'ts for Parents

BY K. ANH DO & CIXIN WANG

Bullying is a serious problem affecting many Asian and Asian American students. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that about 16% of Asian American students are bullied¹. Victimization varies greatly across region and national origin. For example, a 2014 Sikh Coalition report shows that nearly 70% of turbaned Sikh youth surveyed in Fresno, CA were bullied². In a 2012 survey of Asian American youth in New York City, the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund found that nearly 50% had experienced biased-based harassment³.

What exactly is bullying? The Center for Disease Control defines bullying as, "any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated"⁴.

People assume that Asian American students excel in school and face few serious challenges.

Bullying can be physical or verbal. Bullying can also be relational, where students spread rumors to harm or damage a person's relationship with other people. Cyberbullying is a form of bullying that happens online via cell phones, personal websites, blogs, e-mails, texting, chat rooms and video games. Cyberbullying usually co-occurs with traditional forms of bullying, and most youth who experience cyberbullying also experience bullying in person.

¹ National Center for Education Statistics: <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2017/2017015.pdf>

² The Sikh Coalition: <http://www.sikhcoalition.org/documents/pdf/go-home-terrorist.pdf>

³ Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF): http://aaldef.org/2013_NYC_bullying_report.pdf

⁴ Center for Disease Control and Prevention: https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/bullying_factsheet.pdf



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Research Highlights

PROFESSOR JULIE PARK

Many Asian immigrant parents move to the United States with the hope of giving their children a better life and a brighter future. But how do children from immigrant families fare as adults? In a recent study, Professor Julie Park, at the University of Maryland, College Park (Sociology), compares Latino and Asian men and women who were born in the U.S. to immigrant parents.

She and her team find that second-generation women attain more education and higher occupations than their mothers. Second-generation men do not show this trend. In fact, they seemed to have lower levels of education compared with their fathers. Though women have achieved similar levels of education and higher occupations than men, second-generation women still earn less than second-generation men.

To read more about Dr. Park's study: link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13524-015-0423-0

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PROFESSOR DEREK IWAMOTO

Substance use is on the rise among Asian American youth and young adults. Professor Derek Iwamoto, at the University of Maryland, College Park (Psychology) studies alcohol use among Asian American college students.



One of Dr. Iwamoto's most recent projects looks at heavy episodic drinking. Heavy episodic drinking, also called binge drinking, occurs when students drink a large amount of alcohol in a short period of time. Professor Iwamoto found that second-generation Asian American male students (the U.S.-born children of immigrants) were more likely to have problems binge drinking than first-generation Asian American male students, born outside of the United States. One reason could be acculturation. Asian American students who were born in the U.S. are more likely to have similar values and acceptance towards alcohol as the mainstream American society.

To read more about Dr. Iwamoto's study: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.3109/10826084.2016.1170142>



PHOTO BY MINNIE MENON

Bullying towards Asian American students often goes unnoticed by teachers and school staff because of the 'model minority' stereotype. When this stereotype is applied, people assume that Asian American students excel in school and face few serious challenges.

Children and youth who have been bullied may have problems sleeping or experience other physical symptoms such as headaches or stomachaches.

Among Asian American students who were bullied, over 1 in 3 said that they were bullied because of cultural differences.

Some students may use alcohol or other drugs to help them cope with being bullied. They may begin to lose interest in school or may fear going to classes. They may also lose interest in other parts of their lives, leading to depression, a sense of worthlessness, or not belonging.

Professor Cixin Wang, at the University of Maryland - College Park, and her research team recently carried out a study with elementary-school-aged Asian American students⁵. Her team found that *among Asian American students who were bullied, over 1 in 3 said that they were bullied because of cultural differences*, mainly due to physical and language differences. For example, people may assume that Asian American students are not truly 'American' because of their physical features. Because of this, students may be called names that evoke foreign or outsider status. Asian American students may also be viewed as "not truly American" because they have names that are less familiar to most Americans.

According to Professor Wang, Asian American students are also being targeted because of the 'model minority' stereotype. Other students may assume that Asian American students are high performing academically or well-liked by teachers. This may cause resentment towards Asian American students, making them likely targets for bullying. Asian American students also reported that not excelling in traditional U.S. sport activities is another potential source of harassment by other students.

Asian American students who are immigrants are more likely to be bullied than immigrant students from other ethnic groups (e.g., European)⁶. Discrimination and being victimized by peers can raise the risk of depression and other emotional or psychological problems. These students are less likely to seek help for their mental health needs, even at school. Dr. Wang finds that having a positive school racial climate, where diversity is respected, can mitigate peer victimization of Asian American students. It is important for teachers, as well as parents, to create a positive school climate where individual and cultural differences are celebrated.

How to Talk with your Children if they are Being Bullied

It can be difficult to hear that bullying is happening to your children. Below are some suggestions of what to do and what not to do when your children tell you that they are being bullied. Additional resources about bullying are provided below.^{7,8}

DO's

Listen to your children, show empathy and validate their feelings.

Let your children know that you hear their concerns and want to help, so that they don't feel that you are ignoring the problem.

Work with adolescents and develop a plan *together* - older children might not want parents to get involved right away.

Share contact information with other parents because there may be other families who are going through a similar situation.

Learn about resources the school offers to help you deal with the situation.

Share your culture with your children and with the larger school community, such as in Show-and-Tell events or festivals related to your culture. Help others learn about diversity and help your children feel proud of their cultural heritage.

Be involved at school through other volunteering activities, such as helping in the classroom or with school fieldtrips.

DON'Ts

Avoid blaming your children for being bullied. For example, avoid asking: "Did you do something to him [the bully] first?" "If you didn't ..., then the bully wouldn't have picked on you."

Do not give quick solutions without first understanding the situation. For example avoid responses such as: "Why don't you just hit him or her back?"

Remember to keep your emotions in check and stop yourself from reacting too quickly without thinking about the potential consequences. For example, confronting the bully or his/her parents could exacerbate the problem.

Acting out of anger and taking actions without discussing the solution with your children may be harmful. Dr. Wang notes that more than half of the youth in her study do not tell parents about bullying because they think their parents will "freak out", embarrass them, or make the situation worse.

Do not assume teachers do not care or they are too busy to help. All 50 states, including Washington, DC have statutes or regulations to prevent bullying and cyberbullying.

At the same time, do not assume that teachers are the experts and that they will take care of everything including bullying. Teachers need your involvement.

⁵ Wang, C., Wang, W., Zheng, L., & Atwal, K. (2016). Bullying prevention as a social justice issue: Implications with Asian American elementary school students. *School Psychology Forum: Research in Practice*, 10(3), 251-264. Website: http://www.education.umd.edu/CollegeNews/2016/School_Psychology_Forum1003-3-Wang.pdf

⁶ Koo, D. J., Peguero, A. A., & Shekarkhar, Z. (2012). The "model minority" victim: Immigration, gender, and Asian American vulnerabilities to violence at school. *Journal of Ethnicity in Criminal Justice*, 10, 129-147.

⁷ Pacer's National Bullying Prevention Center: <http://www.pacer.org/bullying/>

⁸ White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders: Bullying. Website: <https://sites.ed.gov/aapi/aapi-bullying/>

⁹ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services: www.stopbullying.gov

Tips for Parents

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) offers advice on their website (www.stopbullying.gov) to help parents to talk to their children about bullying⁹. One important suggestion is to foster good communication with your children. Let them know that they can talk to you about difficult topics like bullying. Take the time to talk to them every day, and listen carefully to get a good understanding of their social life at school. Below are a few simple questions that you can ask your children:

- What is lunch time like at your school? Who do you sit with?
- Do kids ever call you mean names, or tease you?
- Do you ever feel lonely at school or left out of activities?
- Have you ever been scared to go to school because you were afraid of being bullied?
- Have kids ever bullied you by hitting or pushing you or other things like that?
- Do you ever see kids at your school being bullied by other kids?
- What do you usually do when you see bullying going on?
- Do you or your friends ever leave other kids out of activities?

It may be hard for some Asian American youth to talk to adults about bullying problems due to embarrassment and fear of retaliation. Dr. Wang offers some very useful activities that parents can participate in with their children to help them begin talking about bullying. She suggests that parents read age appropriate books, videos

or T.V. programs with children and discuss how the characters handle peer conflict and bullying. Parents can ask children:

- What problem do you think the main character has?
- What strategies did the main character use to solve the problem?
- What strategies worked for the main character?
- Have you ever had a similar problem? What strategies did you use to solve the problem?



PHOTO BY THOMAS M. PERKINS

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Dr. Cixin Wang is an Assistant Professor of the School of Psychology in the College of Education at the University of Maryland. She received her PhD in School Psychology from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 2011. Her research interests include bullying and bullying prevention, school-based mental health services, mental health literacy, help-seeking among culturally and linguistically diverse students, parenting practice, and family involvement.

