



Providing Culturally Specific Services for Victims/Survivors of Sexual Violence who are International Students from Asia

A Tip Sheet

By the National Organization of Asians & Pacific Islanders Ending Sexual Violence & Monsoon Asians & Pacific Islanders in Solidarity for the Working with Student Populations Campus Consortium from Casa de Esperanza

Introduction

Programs that provide services to victims/survivors of sexual violence should continue to update their knowledge about the diverse communities they serve, especially as area demographics change over time. This is especially true of a shifting student body on college and university campuses, and particularly in terms of international students. International students come from different cultural backgrounds and their ties to a campus are likely impermanent because of the limited duration of their education. Students who arrive in the United States from overseas also may be independent for the first time and have to learn quickly to navigate the higher education experience in a foreign environment, including dealing with academics, finances, time management, social connections, and personal well-being. In addition, they may have limitations communicating in American English. It is, therefore, incumbent upon educational institutions and affiliated programs to ensure that programs intended to raise awareness of and prevent sexual assault on campuses take into account the needs of multicultural international students, as well as have trained advocates and vital resources and referrals at hand.

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Numbers: International Students from Asia

According to educationdata.org, there were **1,095,299** international students studying in the United States in 2019 (making up 5.5% of the total US student body). Most major universities have been seeing an extraordinary growth in Asian student enrollment in the past couple of decades.¹

- In total, 60% of all international students in the United States were from Asia².
- 34% of all international students in the United States were from China, followed by India and South Korea.

In 2019, institutions of higher education with the largest number of international students were located in urban areas and were private colleges/universities.³



Sexual Violence: Asians & Pacific Islanders

In 2018, according to the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics, 734,630 cases of rape/sexual assault were reported nationally⁴. A study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, from 1995 to 2013, showed that women ages 18-24 experienced the highest rates of rape and sexual assault victimization; and 83% of rape and sexual assault victims were identified as female, while 17% were male. In addition, more than 3 in 4 student victims of rape and sexual assault knew the offender.⁵ According to the Campus Climate Survey Validation Study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics⁶, the prevalence of sexual violence against undergraduate females in the 2014-2015 academic year was 10.3% (also it was the average rate across the nine educational institutions that were part of the study) and 3.1% against undergraduate males. Specific statistics for campus sexual violence and international students are unavailable.

1 Although about 30% of new international students were not able to enter the United States for the Fall 2020 semester because of the global coronavirus pandemic and U.S. policies, the number of international students in the United States, especially from Asia, continues to remain significant. See: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/education/2020/07/30/college-student-visa-no-new-international-students-us-universities/5543220002/>

2 <https://educationdata.org/international-student-enrollment-statistics/>

3 www.iie.org. <https://www.studyinternational.com/news/international-students-usa-universities-2019/>

4 Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2018 (2019). <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv18.pdf>

5 Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Rape and Sexual Victimization Among College-Aged Females, 1995-2013 (2014). <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/rsavcaf9513.pdf>

6 Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Campus Climate Survey Validation Study Final Technical Report (2016). <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ccsvsfr.pdf>

However, the 2010-2012 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey⁷ of the general population states:

- 18.3% of Asian-Pacific Islander (API) women experienced sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime.
- 22.9% of API women experienced some form of sexual violence (not just from an intimate partner) during their lifetime.
- 9.5% of API women experienced rape at some point during their lifetime.
- 13.7% of API men experienced sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime.
- 9.4% of API men experienced some form of sexual violence during their lifetime.

Despite such high rates of occurrence, **evidence-based research on sexual violence on campus specific to API students and international students and how they heal is scarce.**⁸ **However, culturally specific resources and services for such victims are crucial as part of overall efforts to prevent and end sexual violence.**

Barriers for Asian Students Seeking Services: Culture of Silence

A number of social and structural barriers prevent international students from Asia from reporting sexual violence or seeking help:

- Fear of challenging stereotypes;
- Self-blame and shame;
- Sex and sexuality regarded as taboo subjects in families and communities;
- Male privilege and ensuing narrow conceptions of what constitutes abuse;
- Sense of helplessness over retaliation from the harm-doer;
- Difficulty disengaging from problematic relationships;
- Caring for the harm-doer, who may be from the same community;
- Unable to access family support;
- Perceived personal control over recovery;
- Concerns about confidentiality and safety;
- Lack of knowledge about academic and housing options;
- Concerns over missing classes and failing grades;

⁷ National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (2010-2012) <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/NISVS-StateReportBook.pdf>

⁸ http://cjhp.fullerton.edu/Volume7_2009/Issue2/Shenoy.pdf

- Unfamiliarity about medical care and insurance;
- Ignorance about U.S. laws and concerns about immigration status;
- Lack of knowledge about campus policies, procedures and programs;
- Fear of the criminal justice system, or conversely, viewing the criminal justice system as being able to resolve violent experiences;
- Racism and marginalization, which in 2020 have been exacerbated as a result of the COVID pandemic;
- Preference for non-conventional healing systems;
- Stigma associated with counseling and other forms of assistance, particularly from the government and other sources viewed as “outsiders”;
- Adherence to faiths that espouse the gender binary;
- Differing cultural norms, such as a high reverence for the family over the individual;
- Desire to “save face” or avoid “losing face,” a concept that refers to a person’s sense and preservation of self-image, which is also extended to immediate families;
- Pressure to succeed and take care of one’s parents in the country of origin (primacy of educational achievement over individual struggle);
- Language hurdles.

These impediments perpetuate the **culture of silence** on sexual violence, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. **Many international students carry with them this “baggage” when they join campus communities, albeit at varied levels.**

Gaps in Services on Campus: Lack of Culturally and Linguistically Specific Programming

The major gap in services for international students from Asia is the **lack of culturally and linguistically specific programs and services for victims of gender-based violence.**

This neglect leads to services that are mainstream-focused, may prompt misguided interventions, and could inadvertently cause additional harm for survivors.

What Can You Do?

Effective Culturally Specific Practices for Intervention and Prevention

Peer-to-peer campus advocacy: Recruit interns or volunteers who are Asian international or Asian American students

Hire a diverse range of students who represent their Asian peers on campus. Ensure that the recruits have appropriate language skills and cultural knowledge, and train and guide them to be effective advocates and outreach workers, recognizing that discussing sexual assault can often cause discomfort for an advocate as well as for a victim. Look for student volunteers throughout the school year who can assist in violence prevention programming on campus. To draw potential advocates and volunteers, target student associations; faculty in social sciences, public health, and medicine; and other community entities.

Partner with and help strengthen campus student organizations that are specifically for Asians and/or international students

Become familiar with all student groups on campus, particularly Asian and international ones. Build relationships by attending events organized by the groups, arranging meetings with their leaders, co-hosting or speaking at events, and staying connected. In return, request the groups to attend your trainings on addressing sexual violence on campus or organize trainings and events together. This connection could help you tap into a source of peer-to-peer advocates and volunteers, and help raise awareness and knowledge about relevant resources for assistance among such student communities. Because the student population is transient, it is important to also stay in touch with faculty or campus staff who support these groups. Be **RECIPROCAL, RESPECTFUL, and CONSISTENT** with your outreach efforts.

Create safe spaces by integrating other topics into community outreach and sexual violence prevention initiatives

The goal is to create safe spaces for healing and for allowing disclosures or reporting to be organic and not forced or coerced. Therefore, coordinate events that do not center on sexual violence but rather on issues that can be connected to sexual violence, such as self-care, reproductive health, gender roles, healthy relationships, and intimacy. These are topics that are less likely to cause trauma or re-traumatize. Intentionally plan and hold creative support groups, especially those that foster self-care and healing.

When creating training materials for campus sexual violence intervention and prevention, it is imperative to integrate definitions, cultural context, institutional

policies and procedures, on and off campus services and what they entail, institutional responsibilities and survivors rights in these materials, and categorically in the context of the Asian experience. Provide examples or case scenarios that are specific to the Asian community. If there is a local culturally specific victim service organization in your area, connect with it and seek to co-create the materials. Ask the organization to co-present/co-facilitate the trainings with you.

For community outreach, consider creating spaces that are safe for survivors and have been identified as such, for meeting criteria like confidentiality, inclusivity, and commitment to advocate for sexual violence survivors. If you choose to design and hand out brochures, consider how much information it will include considering the recipient's safety. Some information might be better accessed safely online. Ultimately consider materials that are simple and that include clear information about culturally specific services, contact details, as well as a link to access more information online.

Co-advocate and collaborate with local culturally specific programs as well as with mainstream organizations

Community outreach should center on community building with diverse student groups and with other culturally specific community-based organizations, as well as with Coordinated Community Response teams. Plan events or trainings together. Co-host events for Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month, Sexual Assault Awareness Month or Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. Consider cultural and linguistic needs and approaches when organizing events and ensure that they are creative and speak to youth culture, for e.g., online or social media practices or participation of students who come from cultures where dating is forbidden. It is important to also support other marginalized communities and work together in the global movement to end gender-based oppressions and violence. In addition, alliances with mainstream organizations will promote inclusivity as well as prevent isolation. Establishing meaningful partnerships and collaborations improves the ability to provide more effective referrals and relief for survivors.

Ensure meaningful language access

Bilingual/bicultural or multilingual/multicultural advocates are of prime importance because victims can share their stories without fear of misunderstandings, comprehend their rights accurately, and avoid becoming overwhelmed. Coordinate with culturally specific community partners to facility space to have bilingual/bicultural or multilingual/multicultural advocates on campus if you do not have these advocates. If academic, justice, legal or

healthcare systems are involved, advocates should be present with victims, supporting them with clear communication during any interactions. All efforts must be made to recruit and train culturally sensitive and linguistically skilled volunteers to diversify and increase the pool of advocates and improve delivery of services.

Include transnational advocacy/services

For survivors of sexual violence who are international students, a continuation of survivor-centered and trauma-informed services is necessary for optimal healing in the event a student moves away for safety, to another campus, or to the student's home country. This can be, with the prior agreement of the survivor, either a transfer of services to a local program in the new site or your program's services provided online. Form a list of available Asian-focused sexual assault victim support services or counseling/therapy services around the country and in Asian countries and update the list regularly.

Promote resources that are culturally appropriate, keeping in mind victims' spiritual/religious backgrounds, gender and sexual identities, and disabilities as well as transportation accessibility

Services for victims that involve mental health therapy, substance abuse treatment or faith-based assistance should ideally be sensitive to the needs of international students, who could be addressing their victimization in isolation because of lack of awareness and related barriers of access to resolution and recovery. Programs, therefore, must advocate for these kinds of diverse services with campus and city leaders, urging investment in such entities that would benefit not only public health but also community development.

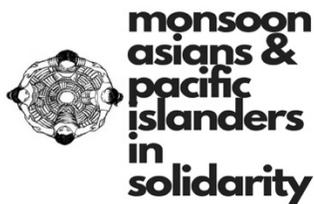
Update knowledge and skills: Keep up with global news, studies, literature, trends, etc., in diverse fields

All service providers should build capacity to provide optimal services to survivors of sexual violence on campus. Organizational leadership must be supportive of advocates' professional development to create robust and effective programming and to be aware of trends and emerging issues. Furthermore, continue to periodically evaluate the effectiveness of services.

Resources:

- [International Resource Project, Monsoon United Asian Women of Iowa](#)
- [National Organization of Asians and Pacific Islander Ending Sexual Violence](#)
- [Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence](#)
- [Sexual Assault Demonstration Initiative, National Sexual Violence Resource Center](#)
- [Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, United States Department of State](#)

If you're interested in receiving technical assistance or would like further information, email us at campus@casadeesperanza.org



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