

# Sexual Health Module



## Sexuality and Asian American Youth

The article, "Influences of Culture on Asian Americans' Sexuality" by Sumie Okazaki from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign analyzes the results of sexual patterns of Asian American youth and how cultural upbringing may influence these patterns.

Asian American youths' sexuality and sexual behavior patterns differ from other non-Asian American youth due to differences in cultural belief and upbringing regarding sexuality and personal conduct. "Sex is a taboo subject in contemporary Chinese culture, where sex education in schools is minimal and parents as well as health professionals are reluctant to discuss sexuality and sexual intercourse" (Chan, 1986). Propriety and observance of strict moral and social conduct are values that are emphasized within the Asian culture (Abraham, 1999). Modesty and retained sexuality are promoted and valued.

Results from various surveys and studies revealed differences among Asian Americans compared to other ethnicities regarding sexual timetables and number of sexual partners. Research results may reflect these values as Asian American non-virgins report lowest number of lifetime partners for vaginal intercourse. National Youth Risk Behavior Survey data (total N=52,985) conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Grunbaum, Lowry, Kann, & Pateman, 2000) found Asian American high school students were significantly less likely than Black, Hispanic, or White students to have had sexual intercourse or to have had four or more sex partners.

Overall, it is found that "Asian Americans tend to be more sexually conservative than non-Asian Americans of the same age group, particularly with regard to the older age of initiation of sexual activity." Being aware of these factors are

important for recognizing how Asian American cultural background and beliefs may influence sexual attitudes and behaviors impacting public health and clinical work.

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### Highlights:

- Barriers for Asian American women in seeking care for sexual and reproductive health.
- Acculturation plays a large role in determining time of the first sexual encounter.
- Read what your chapter can do to become more aware of sexual health.
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender Asian Americans.

## Editor's Note: Reflection on why we choose to do this topic

The reason we chose to do this sexual health awareness education module was because we recognized that sex and sexual health is a taboo topic within the Asian American community. It is important to promote sexual health awareness and education so that individuals can make informed and healthy decisions for themselves. The sexual health and reproductive issues within this module will be useful information that as future physicians we should be aware that our Asian American patients may be ignorant or embarrassed about sexual health issues as

they are not acknowledged in the home setting. As future Asian American physicians, our patients may be more receptive to our advice and guidance. Therefore, we hope that our patients may open up more about their sexual health concerns and questions. It is important that we have this awareness so we can prevent early detection and prevention of end stage cervical or breast cancer development among Asian American females.

Another reason is while researching material for

this module we realized that there is a serious lack of data on the sexual health status of Asian Americans. While this module will serve to highlight only a few issues (out of many) that may be more relevant to us as medical students and Asian Americans, we hope that you will be motivated to read a few of the articles cited or do your own lit. search after reading this to get a better understanding of APA sexual health issues. Maybe one day you can contribute your own research data to this important topic!

## Asian American Sexual and Reproductive Health

Within the article, "Influences of Culture on Asian Americans' Sexuality" by Sumie Okazaki from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, it is brought to our attention sexual and reproductive health issues among Asian American girls and women. Sexual and reproductive health is not a subject that is openly discussed or followed up through medical check ups among the Asian American female population. Studies conducted show that Asian American women are "found to be less likely than other ethnic group women to enroll in breast cancer screening programs even when out-of-pocket expenses for the screening tests were paid by managed care." Furthermore, greater than one third of the study members within their households have never discussed the topics of pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, birth control, or sexuality.

There are a variety of cultural barriers that prevent or cause Asian American women to be less proactive toward seeking sexual and reproductive health care. "Asian American women were found to have more cultural barriers to screening (more communication barrier with mother surrounding sexual and gynecological issues, less openness around

sexuality and more modesty, less prevention orientation in health care, and less utilization of Western medicine)." Furthermore, many Asian Americans believe that gynecological test such as a pap smear before marriage is seen as invasive or inappropriate. Mo (1992) "idea of a visit to a medical doctor for a checkup without receiving some form of intervention (namely medication) does not fit immigrant Chinese patients' expectations"

Unfortunately, the risk factors and cost of not promoting awareness can lead to preventable advanced stages of cancer or other reproductive concerns. It has been found that Asian Americans tend to be less likely than White American girls and women to seek medical care for sexual and reproductive health. It has been found that "Asian American women's sense of risk regarding reproductive and sexual health appeared to be downplayed, as the women tended to view gynecological services as important and legitimate only when they concerned reproductive and sexual health. The women tended to view gynecological services as important and legitimate only when discussing reproductive functions or when the pain or symptoms of infection become unbearable or interfered with daily functioning." Impact of this reveals increased incidence of diagnosis of advanced stages of cervical cancer (Frisch & Goodman, 2000) and breast cancer

(Jenkins & Kagawa-Singer, 1994) found among the Asian American population. These results also causes a raise in medical costs for Asian American women having not obtained sexual or reproductive health care services.

### Sources

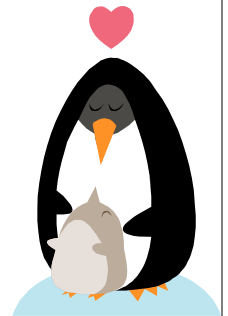
Frisch, M., & Goodman, M. T. (2000). Human papillomavirus-associated carcinomas in Hawaii and the mainland U.S. *Cancer*, 88. 1464-1469.

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## Statistics on APA Sexual Health

- "Among young women, the most acculturated were more likely to have had sexual intercourse than the least acculturated (odds ratio, 4.9); acculturation was not associated with sexual intercourse for young men (Hahm, 2006)."
- "Medium and high levels of parental attachment were associated with decreased odds of sexual experience for young women (0.4 and 0.2), but not for young men (Hahm, 2006)."
- "Binge drinking was associated with an increased risk of sexual experience for young women (6.4), and tobacco use was associated with increased risk for young men (3.0) (Hahm, 2006)."
- "In 2007, Whites had 1.15 times the reported Chlamydia rates, 1.85 times the reported gonorrhea rates, and 1.64 times the reported syphilis rates of APIs (CDC, 2008)."
- "In 2007, the Chlamydia rate among Asian/Pacific Islanders was 139.5 cases per 100,000 population, a slight increase from the 2006 rate of 127.2. It is the lowest among all race groups in the US (CDC, 2008)."
- "In 2007 the gonorrhea rate among Asian/Pacific Islanders was 18.8 cases per 100,000 population. Again, it is the lowest among all race groups in the US (CDC, 2008)."
- "In 2004, the birth rate for API teens was the lowest of all racial/ethnic groups, 17.4 per 1,000, compared to the national rate of 41.2 per 1000. The rate fell by more than a third between 1991 and 2003. (Bridges, 2007)"
- "Data from National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (known as Add Health) published in 2006 showed that API youth were significantly less likely to use condoms at first intercourse than all other racial/ethnic groups (Bridges, 2007)."
- "A recent study of API college students found that 37 percent had unprotected sex (no use of any type of contraception) in their lifetimes, believed to be the lowest percentage of all racial/ethnic groups (Bridges, 2007)."

## Homosexuality in the APA Community

In the editor's note, we mentioned that there is very little data on Asian American sexual health so it comes as no surprise that there is even less on the topic of homosexuality among APAs. In fact, much of the scholarly literature dealt only with HIV risk in Asian men who have sex with men. This topic while very important does not provide us a clear picture of the population at large. Similarly in the context of society, while this sub-group certainly exists within the Asian American population, they are not often acknowledged by the mainstream population. A reason why is that many Asian cultures are still uncomfortable with homosexuality and therefore do not find it an acceptable sexual orientation. As a result,

LGBT Asian Americans may feel conflicted internally since their cultural and LGBT communities seem to be mutually exclusive.

It is in the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force annual report from surveying LGBT Asian Americans that we are able to characterize just who they are. In the 2007 report, "Living in the Margins" by Alain Dang and Cabrini Vianney we learn that they are Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, Indian, etc. Their gender breakdown is 53% men, 41% women and 10% transgender. The sexual orientation of the respondents are 47% gay, 19% lesbian, 9% bisexual and 20% "queer". Most of the APA LGBTs have had the experience of being doubly discriminated against, for

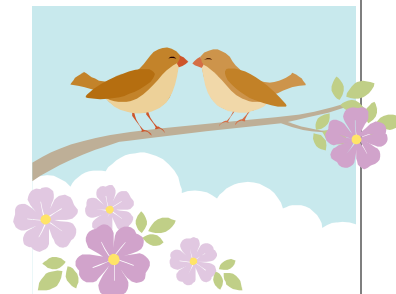
their skin color and their sexual orientation. They usually experienced the discrimination in the form of verbal harassment while a smaller percentage experienced physical harassment. The top three issues that are currently most important to the APA LGBT community are policies to address hate violence & harassment, having media representation and marriage equality.

Read the entire report at: <http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/reports/>

[API\\_ExecutiveSummaryEnglish.pdf](#)

Source:

Lin, L. "LGBT APA Family Portrait." [IM Diversity.com](http://www.imdiversity.com). 15 October 2004 <[http://www.imdiversity.com/Villages/Asian/family\\_lifestyle\\_traditions/paccit\\_lgbt\\_families\\_1004.asp](http://www.imdiversity.com/Villages/Asian/family_lifestyle_traditions/paccit_lgbt_families_1004.asp)>



### Want to hold a Sexual Health Education Workshop?

As a program within your APAMSA chapter, during a volunteer health fair it may be a good idea to host a table or workshop to the Asian American population or general population visiting the health regarding various topics regarding sexual and reproductive health awareness topics.

Listed below are ideas for resources to promote about at a health fair or ideas for further workshops you may want to host at a local high school or middle school health education class or within your chapter:

- Educational resources educational material regarding safe sex practices (contraception usage, pregnancy preven-

tion, statistics, etc.)

- Read an article on Asian misconceptions (male penis size and Asian females- hypersexualized "Dragon ladies" or docile "China dolls" )
- Talk about body image (fixation on being skinny, double eye lid surgery and the use of skin whitening creams)

- Discussion addressing LGBT issues within the APA community.
- Panel talk on domestic violence & sexual abuse in relationships.
- Provide a forum for debate on abstinence only vs. sex ed classes for grade school & high school students

#### Online resources for sexual health:

[www.teachingsexualhealth.ca/media/lessons/5\\_AnatomyPhysiologyLesson1.pdf](http://www.teachingsexualhealth.ca/media/lessons/5_AnatomyPhysiologyLesson1.pdf)

[www.teachingsexualhealth.ca/media/lessons/5\\_AnatomyPhysiologyHO\\_APCrosswordPuzzle.pdf](http://www.teachingsexualhealth.ca/media/lessons/5_AnatomyPhysiologyHO_APCrosswordPuzzle.pdf)

## Healthy benefits of sex

According to Kathleen Doheny and Dr. Louise Chang from WebMD.com the benefits of sex go beyond physical pleasure and in fact is good for your health:

- 1) Sex relieves stress— helps to lower blood pressure.
- 2) Sex boosts immunity— by increasing levels of IgA.
- 3) Sex burns calories— 30 minutes of sex burns at least 85 calories.

- 4) Sex improves cardiovascular health—may reduce risk of heart attack for men.
- 5) Sex boosts self esteem—it'll make you feel good about yourself.
- 6) Sex improves intimacy— increased levels of oxytocin facilitates bonding.
- 7) Sex reduces pain—release of oxytocin leads to release of endorphins.

- 8) Sex reduces risk of prostate cancer—apparently as the result of frequent ejaculations.
- 9) Sex strengthens pelvic floor muscles—helps to minimize risk of incontinence later.
- 10) Sex helps you sleep better— oxytocin at work again

Check out the website to get more details: <http://www.webmd.com/sex-relationships/features/10-surprising-health-benefits-of-sex>





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APAMSA is the Asian Pacific American Medical Student Association. We are a national organization that aims to address those issues important to Asian-American medical students.

One part of our mission is to bring together Asians and others interested in the health issues that affect Asians so that we may have a strong, collective, public and political voice. We are interested in both directly promoting the health and well-being of the Asian community as well as in helping all health care workers who work with these communities understand how to care for the Asian patient in a culturally sensitive manner. Finally, APAMSA provides an important forum for APA medical students to meet, exchange information and experiences and develop personally and professionally.

**Sexual Health WORD SEARCH**

Take sometime to relax and have fun between studies by doing this Sexual Health Word search! Try to find **all 30** words!

W M Q H J F H Q S K G O O M A D L M N L  
M G O N O R R H E A H W R V F Q P Y A X  
J Q V O F O G X J M S I J P U A P M M E  
F J A S T F E R T I L I Z A T I O N O K  
Z S R E P V A G I N A Z N E P W X B W P  
F E Y X R E Y L T U G J D E X C F P V Q  
N P F U E G R P L C O N C E P T I O N B  
E R Y A G G E M G O H E P A T I T I S O  
V E V L N E P E A N P L I P J N G V S U  
Z H C H A K R N B T V I A R A F C D I A  
D L Q E N M O S S R O O A M A N R E L F  
P A K A C W D T T A S G I N Y B G N L G  
A T W L Y V U R I C E L E Z T D J I I W  
Z I U T I R C U N E L J B N I U I C H X  
U N H H E O T A E P C L Q J E W B A P I  
S E H T N E I T N T I N E M E S U E Y K  
W G H D R A O I C I T O N R L F I Y S J  
P R O U E P N O E O S M U T O R C S F H  
A M S J E P G N Q N E S J F E U Y S E L  
I I K S T R A W L A T I N E G O N Q V R



- ABSTINENCE
- CHLAMYDIA
- CONCEPTION
- CONDOM
- CONTRACEPTION
- EGG
- FALLOPIAN TUBES
- FERTILIZATION
- GENITAL HERPES
- GENITAL WARTS
- GONORRHEA
- HEPATITIS
- HIV
- HPV
- MAN
- MENSTRUATION
- OVARY
- PENIS
- PREGNANCY
- REPRODUCTION
- SCROTUM
- SEMEN
- SEXUAL HEALTH
- SPERMATOGENESIS
- SYPHILLIS
- TESTICLES
- URETHRA
- UTERUS
- VAGINA
- WOMAN

