



## Factors related to sexual behaviors and sexual education programs for Asian-American adolescents



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### ABSTRACT

**Aim:** To understand the influential factors related to sexual behaviors among Asian-American adolescents and to evaluate common factors across successful sexual education programs for this population.

**Background:** Despite a rapid increase in cases of STIs/HIV among Asian-American populations, there remains a need for a comprehensive understanding of the influential factors related to risky sexual behaviors for this population.

**Methods:** An integrative literature review was conducted. Peer-reviewed articles and government resources were analyzed.

**Results:** Five influential factors were identified: family-centered cultural values, parental relationship, acculturation, gender roles, and lack of knowledge and information about sex and STIs. Only two sexual education programs met the inclusion criteria and provided evidence towards effectiveness: Safer Choices and Seattle Social Development Project.

**Conclusions:** The findings of this study indicate an urgent need for culturally sensitive sexual education programs that incorporate the identified influential factors, especially cultural values in order to reduce risky sexual behaviors among Asian-American adolescents.

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### 1. Introduction

Despite increased awareness and prevention efforts to reduce the prevalence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs)/HIV and teen pregnancy in the United States, disparities in STIs prevalence and teen pregnancy by race and ethnicity still exist and have become a major public health issue. Teen pregnancy rates have steadily declined for all races except American Indian/Alaska natives and Asian-Americans for whom teen pregnancy rates did not change (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2014). In addition, Asian Americans reported a higher prevalence of STIs, especially chlamydia and primary and secondary syphilis, compared to Caucasians (CDC, 2012). More concerning is that Asian-Americans in the U.S. make up 1% of the total HIV/AIDS infected cases, and rates and prevalence have risen among this population (Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum [AANHP]). In a recent CDC report, the largest increase in HIV/AIDS diagnosed cases was among

Asian-American men who have sex with men (MSM), ages 13–24 years, which is a 255.6% increase from 2001 to 2006. In addition, the rate of HIV diagnosis for Asian-Americans has increased over time from 6.1% per 100,000 in 2005 to 6.5% per 100,000 in 2010 (CDC, 2008). Overall, compared to other racial/ethnic groups, only Asian-Americans had a significant increase in annual HIV/AIDS diagnosis rates (CDC, 2006). These statistics imply that Asian-American young adults are engaged in risky sexual behaviors, which increase their vulnerability to STIs/HIV. Despite a rapid increase in cases of STIs/HIV among Asian-American populations over the past ten years, there is still a widespread perception that these populations are at lower risk for STIs including HIV/AIDS compared to any other populations. Limited research about Asian-American health and STIs/HIV has resulted in few targeted prevention programs in response to these risky behaviors in this population.

The U.S. Census Bureau (2013) reported that Asian-American populations were estimated at 15.8 million, constituting 5.3% of the total U.S. population in 2013. Collectively, these populations are the most rapidly growing groups in the U.S., with a 43% population increase between 2000 and 2010, whereas the total U.S. population only increased by 9.7% during that same time period (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010a, 2010b). The Asian-American population consists of a diverse group of persons having origins of the original people of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent, including: Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010a). By the year 2050, the number of U.S.

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residents who self-identify as Asian-American is projected to be 37.6 million, or 9.3% of the total population. Along with the overall increase in Asian-American populations, the Asian-American adolescents are also the fastest growing ethnic minority group in the U.S., increasing by 31% between 2000 and 2010 (Mather, Pollard, & Jacobsen, 2011).

Many Asian-Americans share unique cultural values and behaviors that influence sexual practices for adolescents of this population (Okazaki, 2002; Sabato & Silverio, 2010). Within this culture, sex and sexuality are viewed as taboo subjects. As a result, parental and adolescent communication about sex or sexuality rarely occurs in a family setting. Premarital sex is discouraged and sex is not considered an open topic for discussion. Such sexual conservatism is viewed as vital to the maintenance of family unity (Okazaki, 2002; Sabato & Silverio, 2010; Tosh & Simmons, 2007). These cultural values on sex and sexuality may place Asian-American adolescents at greater risk for compromised sexual health. Compared to White adolescents, Asian-American adolescents have less knowledge about the risk of HIV and other STIs. In addition, the Asian-American high school students reported lower condom use (48.9%) compared to other students who are Hispanic (55.2%), White (58.6%), and Black (65.7%) (Lee & Rotheram-Borus, 2009). Despite the increasing Asian-American population and increased risk of STIs/HIV prevalence among Asian-American adolescents, few studies have specifically focused on their sexual behaviors. Although several studies have examined various risk factors including parental communication, sex education, substance use, and peer influences in reducing risk for adolescents, few studies synthesize and compile published data on understanding the factors related to risky sexual behaviors for Asian-American adolescents and examine sexual education programs developed for this population.

The purpose of this integrative literature review was to understand the influential factors related to sexual behaviors among Asian-American adolescents and to evaluate common factors across successful sexual education programs for this population. The findings of the study will enhance the understanding of sexual behaviors among Asian-American adolescents and provide suggestions for future sexual education programs for Asian-American adolescents. The following research questions were addressed in this study:

- What influential factors play a central role in sexual behaviors among Asian-American adolescents?
- What are the common factors across successful sexual education programs that reduce risky sexual behaviors among Asian-American adolescents?

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Design

An integrative literature review design was used to provide a comprehensive view of the literature regarding factors leading to increased risky sexual behaviors and effective sexual education programs for Asian-American adolescents in the U.S. As an analytical method, an integrative literature review has a broad, all-inclusive design that includes review of both experimental and non-experimental research. An integrative literature review is therefore useful in furthering understanding of risky sexual behaviors and effective sexual education programs. This integrative literature review provides a summary of previously conducted research and will play an important role in finding fundamental information to enhance the understanding of the sexual behaviors among Asian-Americans (Whittemore & Knaf, 2005).

### 2.2. Literature search strategies

For this literature review, a search was performed using CINAHL, PubMed, PsychInfo, and the Cochrane Library database, as well as

reliable public health resources such as the CDC Advocates for Youth, and the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (USDHHS). Peer-reviewed articles and government resources were analyzed and evaluated to address each of the research questions proposed in the study. Multiple text combinations used in the search contained the key words: Asian-American adolescents, HIV, AIDS, STIs, pregnancy, sexuality, intervention/prevention program, sexual education program for adolescents in U.S., factors, and cultural factors.

### 2.3. Analytic strategy

For the first research question, identifying influential factors related to sexual behaviors among Asian-American adolescents, articles were reviewed to find relevant information that addressed factors playing an essential role in risky sexual behaviors of this target population (Figure 1). The inclusion criteria used in this search were:

- A study population that included Asian-American adolescents
- Published between 2004 and 2015
- Statistical acknowledgement of high risk sexual behavior
- Identification of factors that influence sexual behaviors among Asian-American adolescents

Throughout the initial search process, a total of 122 articles were found. Of the 122 articles, 18 articles met the inclusion criteria and addressed factors related to sexual behaviors of Asian-American adolescents. Major findings addressed in each article were highlighted to create a list of factors as an initial sorting process. The listed factors were reviewed to identify the recurrence of themes understanding sexual behaviors among Asian-American adolescents. Through this analysis and synthesis, the researchers were able to first group similar factors into a preliminary list and then group similar factors into a final list, which demonstrated a common understanding of sexual behaviors within this group.

To answer the second research question, sexual education programs reported by Advocates for Youth in 2012 and the USDHHS in 2014 were reviewed. Those programs listed were found to be effective at preventing teen pregnancy, HIV, and STIs for adolescents (Advocates for Youth, 2012; USDHHS, 2014). The inclusion criteria used to select the evidence-based programs were as follows:

- Greater than 10% Asian-American study participants
- Total number of study participants greater than 200
- Intervention programs reported to be effective for Asian-American adolescents
- Intervention programs incorporated at least one factor identified in this study
- Intervention programs focused on reducing STIs/HIV transmission and pregnancy in adolescent populations

Only five programs of the 45 programs listed in *Advocates for Youth* (2012) and *USDHHS* (2014) recruited Asian-American adolescents. Of those five programs, only two sexual educational programs met the inclusion criteria. Information about these two programs was compiled into a matrix that recorded the purpose of the program, research design/sample/setting, theoretical framework, description of the interventions, program outcomes on behavior changes, and factors related to sexual practice (Table 1).

## 3. Findings

### 3.1. Factors related to sexual behaviors among Asian-American adolescents

Five factors were identified that can help understand sexual behaviors among Asian-American adolescents: family-centered cultural values; parental relationship; acculturation; gender roles; and lack of knowledge and information about sex and STIs.

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