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Project 3 Story

Living in an immigrant family with parents not knowing a second language is pretty challenging. It comes with hardships, especially for millennials who are born in the states after their parents move there. I happen to be one of them. Since my sister is pretty much the only person who have lived in her home country, moved here, went to school and learned English, she's pretty much the only person who I can rely on to take care of things that my parents cannot help me with, such as refiling taxes, going through the process of making new passports, and any adult tasks. Everything else, mentally and emotionally, there is some communication I cannot express because I can't speak Chinese fluently. In other words, language barrier was a problem in terms of not being able to talk to them about my mental health or why I am feeling a certain way in different situations. All they know how to do is care for me, finance me, provide for me, tell me to keep up my education, and basically what any parent would know how to do. As a result, everything comes down to being pressured to measure up to this self image where I have to carry myself to become this adult who goes through all stages of life by myself. My parents always compare me to their eldest child, or my oldest sister, and have these standards that they have envisioned for me. I think in Asian culture, they really do not know how to handle their loved ones who may have mental health issues. I wanted to learn why my parents are the way they are, so I wanted to highlight some research I found that will hopefully help you guys understand this dilemma with mental illness vs Asian culture.

According to an online article from Anxiety and Depression Association of America's website "Asian-Americans", it states that "Asian-Americans are 3x less likely to seek mental health services than other Americans". "Only 8.6 percent of Asian-Americans sought any type of mental health services or resource compared to nearly 18 percent of the general population nationwide", KoKo Nishi mentions in the article named "Mental Health Among Asian-Americans" from the American Psychological Association website. One of the reasons why these statistics exist in the first place is one: pressure from parents to succeed academically. Another one is discussing anything related to mental health would be avoided and brushed off, so they tend to neglect or deny that they even have mental illness in the first place. Most Asian families have the desire to succeed in adapting into the mainstream western culture while overcoming the obstacles of racial bias. Then, there are different and strong traditional and cultural values different Asian cultures are obligated to follow. Sometimes, the word "mental health/illness" does not exist in their vocabulary, and any sign of madness can carry shame. They don't hold any meaningful conversations and it is very common that they try to get over it. Parents and older relatives teach their children to not be coddled and to not be weak, so they have these expectations that their children will grow up self-sufficient enough to handle their own problems. The youth should respect the elders, so they're not allowed to cause problems for the parents. It's easy to say that they're trying to get attention if the parents see that they are not acting accordingly. "For families who are struggling to 'make it' in a new country, discussing mental health isn't first priority since they invested so much of their effort and resources into immigration and struggling to make a good living, children doing well in school, etc. So any signs of mental health problems may be seen as signs of weakness and failure. They were raised with the mentality that breakdown and struggles are not a luxury afforded to them. They expect their kids to be smart, hard-working and uncomplaining like them. Because our parents live a different world than we did, it is no wonder that we will run into issues with communicating with each other in the same language (like me). Even though people today are more open to talking about their mental health, that doesn't mean Asian Americans are seeking out help as often as they should. Even worse, it is hard to find therapists or counselors who are well-spoken or educated on Asian culture enough to understand their identities. Most Asians also take jobs like surgeons, doctors, dentists, so it's even harder to find those who speak or

can translate to the parents what is going on with their children.

That being said, I wanted to present these statistics because I am passionate about this topic and I want to educate my audience about my culture and mental health when it comes to being an Asian. I haven't really experienced tiger parents, which is an extreme case (example would be to the point they hire hitmen to kill their parents-- and believe me that has happened!) to the point I want to take my life, but believe me, I have the same common thoughts that Asian youths who are struggling with mental health issues. I have been through turmoil and had suicidal thoughts or let my negative self hurt myself emotionally and mentally. I have struggled to do things that normally people can do. There are mental obstacles that pulls me back from accomplishing goals that are out of reach. I have been through episodes where I isolate myself from others and keep to myself. Whatever I've been through, the point is that I have not been diagnosed or gone to a therapist. I have I haven't really talked or reached out to my parents about my bad mental health, because I don't even know how to with the language barrier, and I feared it was a taboo or really unknown topic within my family. I felt like they would try to care but would not be able to give good advice, brush it off like it is something that I can get over, or ask me to refer to my oldest sister to help me. That is part of the reason I shut myself off and do not have the motivation or encouragement to seek help from others, or even professional help. The only thing I know how to do is to think that my depression or anxiety is safe or my comfort zone because I have been living through it for some time. As a result, any time I get overwhelmed or overly stressed from school, get teased about my body image, pressured to get a job, get stuck in social scenarios, or whatever problem that causes my mental health to worsen, I get really emotional, break down, let my self-hatred fester inside of me, and resort to unhealthy tactics to cope with my negative self. All because I really want to please myself and my family SO MUCH; to give back in order to be happy anymore because sometimes I feel so useless with my mental struggles and so my purpose, my only purpose, was to work really hard despite it all. They work so hard to provide for the family and went through hardships themselves-- they just had different things to worry about. So, the only way I can communicate to them nonverbally is to respect their wishes and want to give them peace in mind. I want to provide for them like they did for me. The problem is, that is also why I don't take care of myself and always have school on my mind and have no life, don't know how to make friends, and I am the way I am. So yeah, I can really relate to millennials that grew up from immigrant parents' perspectives. But, I consider myself lucky that I have a big sister who knows what I am going through and I can turn to to vent about my problems. She has similar experiences and has gone through that pressure too. Though, she has her own life and is busy with her own family now that I am older, so she can't hold my hand anymore-- which is a bittersweet feeling.

I want to share this story because it doesn't just resort to just Asian American millennials-- it also includes all minorities with immigrant households. I want to bring awareness to all these families of the stigma and such. I really want to give away a few messages to anyone reading this or listening to this. Please, parents, listen to your children. They are young but life is fleeting. If you don't understand what's going on or you refuse to believe your children have mental health issues, please do any little kind gestures and make sure to check up on them and make sure they're okay. And immigrant kids, you are not alone. Please start conversations with your parents and don't be afraid to ask for help from other people you trust. Study psychology and psychiatry-- do anything you can-- to help your kind who are struggling. You break and make your own mold that your parents started for you and bring a brighter future for the future generations to come.