



**Asian American Federation
of New York**

For further information, contact:
Amanda Franks, Carol Schadelbauer or Bethanne Fox,
Burness Communications, 301/652-1558;
Anna Lee, Asian American Federation
of New York, 212/344-5878, ext. 26

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**ASIAN AMERICANS IN NEW YORK STILL SUFFER
FROM DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY SYMPTOMS POST-SEPTEMBER 11TH ;
NEW REPORT URGES EXPANSION OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**

***Asian American Federation Cites Lack of Culturally Appropriate, Accessible Services
For Victims' Families, Chinatown Residents***

New York, N.Y. – Asian Americans in the New York City area are still struggling to recover psychologically from the traumatic events of September 11, 2001, but they face a serious dearth of useful, culturally appropriate mental health services, according to a study released today by the Asian American Federation of New York.

Funded by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the study is the first ever to detail the mental health problems and needs of this particularly vulnerable ethnic community. Based on its findings, the Federation is calling on federal, state, and local policymakers and private funders to expand the availability of mental health services to Asian Americans, ensure that those services are culturally appropriate, and begin planning responses to future disasters that may increase the need for mental health services.

“We found many people simply suffering in silence,” said Federation Executive Director Cao K. O. “As the second anniversary of September 11th approaches, Asian Americans still coping with this tragedy lack effective resources to support their psychological recovery. In their communities, genuine healing needs to occur.”

The Federation used a two-pronged approach to assess the mental health status and needs of Asian American communities severely impacted by the tragedy. The research team conducted one-on-one interviews with 22 family members of Asian Americans who died in the World Trade Center (WTC) attacks and held focus group discussions with 145 Chinatown community members, specifically children, the elderly, and dislocated workers. It is notable that nearly one half of all Asian victims were of South Asian descent.

All of the WTC victims' survivors interviewed demonstrated symptoms of mild to moderate depression, the researchers found. In addition, many of the Chinatown residents who participated in focus groups displayed symptoms of depression, post-traumatic stress syndrome, or anxiety.

Study participants described a variety of ongoing psychological and physical reactions to the tragedy, including grief, hopelessness, sleeping problems, and changes in appetite. Typical reports included that of one victim's family member: "I keep seeing the picture of the building collapsing in front of my eyes, all the time."

Yet, despite these types of symptoms, none of the Chinatown study participants reported using any mental health services in the aftermath of the attacks. A handful of WTC victims' survivors said they were linked with some mental health services through various victims' services programs, but most said they did not find the services helpful.

The Federation cited two reasons for both the lack of service utilization and the poor results reported by the few study participants who did avail themselves of mental health services.

First, Asian cultural values emphasizing self-reliance and reservation typically prompt Asian Americans to avoid seeking assistance for dealing with mental health problems, the report notes. Instead, Asian Americans are apt to use other coping mechanisms – immersing themselves in work or other forms of self-distraction, avoiding discussing or thinking of emotional issues, turning to friends and family, or engaging in ritualistic activities – to deal with intense emotional problems.

Second, significant shortfalls in service availability and quality rendered mental health services inaccessible, irrelevant, or inadequate for many Asian Americans affected by the attacks, according to the study. Among the service gaps identified:

- A shortage of trained mental health professionals with cultural competence and bilingual capabilities to work with Asian Americans;
- Little targeted outreach to Asian American victims' families;
- Lack of trained mental health professionals in supportive service settings;
- Few referrals to longer-term services.

To address these two sets of barriers to mental health assistance, the Federation recommends the following:

- Develop more culturally competent mental health services and other forms of support for Asian Americans.
- Increase the availability and accessibility of community mental health programs that address long-term needs.
- Expand mental health training and bilingual capabilities of front-line staff for programs serving affected populations.
- Step up outreach efforts to Asian Americans on the availability and benefits of mental health services.

- Begin planning a coordinated response by the mental health community for future disasters, with consideration to cultural competence and linguistic capabilities of services for Asian Americans in the New York area.

“Mental health is a long-term issue,” said Benjamin Chu, M.D., president of the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation and a member of the Federation’s Research Advisory Committee that guided this study. “The public and private sectors can and should do more to help Asian Americans get the emotional help they need to rebuild their lives and regain their mental health.”

“We urgently need effective mental health care, support and funding for services, and increased research to understand the very real needs of Asian Americans,” said Stanley Sue, Ph.D., an Advisory Committee member and a nationally prominent psychologist specializing in Asian American mental health. “This report demonstrates the importance of making mental health services available to Asian Americans in their own language and from people who understand their culture.”

Copies of the study report, *Asian American Mental Health: A Post-September 11th Needs Assessment*, are available by calling the Federation at 212/344-5878, or by visiting www.aafny.org.

The Asian American Federation of New York is a nonprofit leadership organization created to help unite the city’s diverse Asian American communities by providing community services, identifying critical needs of Asian Americans and advocating on their behalf. The Federation offers management, financial and technical assistance to 35 member agencies and other emerging organizations that directly provide health and human services to the public.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, based in Princeton, N.J., is the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to health and health care. It concentrates its grantmaking in four goal areas: to assure that all Americans have access to quality health care at reasonable cost; to improve the quality of care and support for people with chronic health conditions; to promote healthy communities and lifestyles; and to reduce the personal, social and economic harm caused by substance abuse - tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs.

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