

Differences in Mental Health Care Needs Among Asian Ethnic Groups in California



The **Asian** population – the fastest-growing racial and ethnic group in California – is diverse, with unique experiences, cultural backgrounds, and demographic profiles, yet is often treated as a single homogeneous population. A new UCLA Center for Health Policy Research study examines **mental health distress, perceived need, and unmet need**, focusing on the variations among Asian ethnic groups in California.

Mental health needs are measured in two different ways:

Perceived need asks adults whether they felt they needed help with mental, emotional, alcohol, or drug problems.



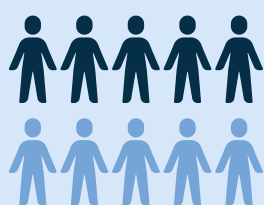
Serious psychological distress (SPD) or moderate psychological distress (MPD) is based on reporting symptoms related to depression and anxiety.



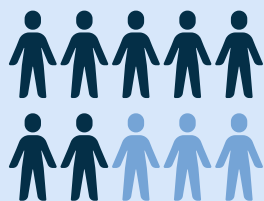
All Asians and some ethnic groups were **more likely to report SPD/MPD**, which shows a need for mental health care, **than they were to think that they needed mental health care**. That could indicate a **mental health literacy gap**.

	All Asian	Korean	Vietnamese	Filipino
SPD/MPD	18%	22%	14%	23%
Perceived Need	14%	14%	9%	19%

Unmet Mental Health Needs Among Asian Adults with Perceived Need vs. Asian Adults with SPD or MPD



More than **5 out of 10** of all Asian adults who **felt they needed mental health services** experienced unmet need for mental health care, however, nearly



7 out of 10 Asian adults with **SPD or MPD** experienced unmet need for mental health care.

What is unmet need?

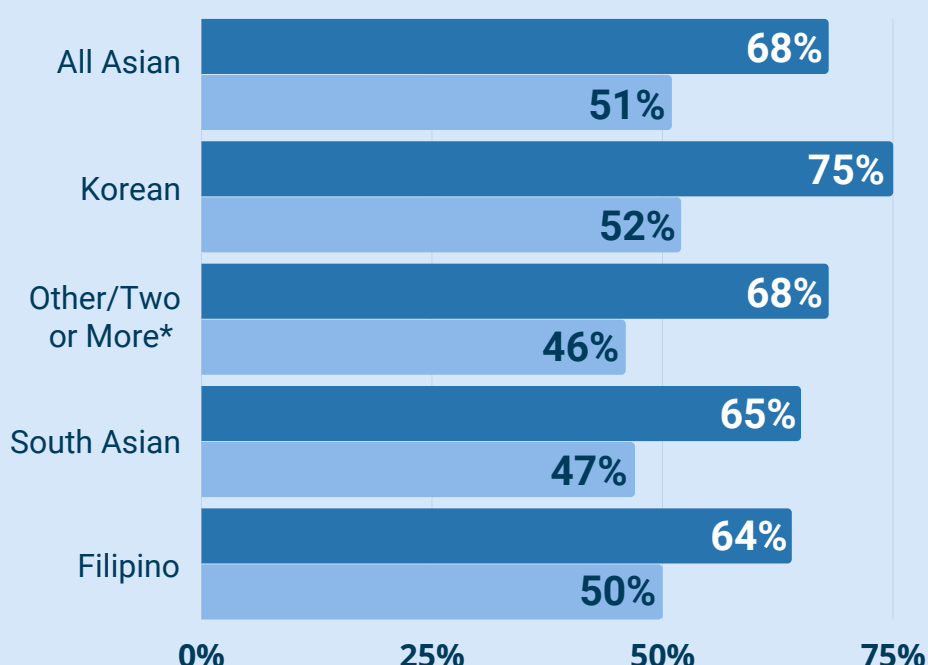
"Unmet need is adults with an identified need who did not receive the care they needed."

What kind of unmet need was measured in the study?

"Asian adults with SPD/MPD" and "Asian adults who perceived they needed mental health services."



All Asians and some ethnic groups with SPD or MPD were **more likely to have an unmet need** than their counterparts with a perceived need, which could also indicate a **mental health literacy gap**.



Legend

- SPD or MPD
- Perceived Need

*Other/Two or More group includes Cambodian, Burmese, Hmong, Laotian, Malaysian, Thai, and Indonesian adults, as well as adults who identify as two or more Asian ethnicities.

Source: 2015–2019 California Health Interview Survey (CHIS)

Policy Recommendations

- Promote mental health literacy.
- Increase access to culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health services.
- Support policies on collecting and reporting disaggregated data.

Read the policy brief: <https://ucla.in/2UxPSnX>