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Marisa J. Perera • Edward C. Chang
Editors

Biopsychosocial Approaches to Understanding Health in South Asian Americans

 Springer

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This book is dedicated to all the individuals who have played major roles in guiding me in my scholarly pursuits, especially Dr. Edward Chang, as well as all the exceptional contributors to this book who serve as leaders in the study of South Asian American health. This book is additionally dedicated to my parents Vijayanthi and Jude Perera for cultivating in me an understanding of both South Asian and American cultures throughout my upbringing and for their endless support of my scholarly development.

Marisa J. Perera

This book is dedicated to the many wonderful individuals who have shared their passion and expertise in developing this important work, most especially to Marisa for allowing me to work together with her.

Edward C Chang

Preface

During our careers studying Asian American health outcomes, we were exposed to the practice of aggregation or compilation of group information without separation into potentially different and meaningful sublevels. We repeatedly encountered instances where data on Asian American health status and chronic disease burden (i.e., prevalence of cancers, diabetes, heart disease, etc.) was collected primarily from one subgroup of Asian ethnic origin and generalized to all individuals identifying as Asian in the USA. As Asian Americans are of different Asian origins, it was evident to us that such generalization was lacking in accuracy at times when generalized to different Asian subgroups. It was also evident that continued use of aggregation had potential to mitigate the potential risk for harmful health conditions that vary by Asian subgroup, including those conditions for which South Asians in the USA have high risk. In support of the disaggregation movement, we sought to bring together scholars devoted to various aspects of the health of South Asians in the USA in order to initiate a health conversation and scholarly space dedicated to the health needs of this Asian subgroup. This process inherently brought about an interdisciplinary effort involving scholarly contributors across the fields of medicine, psychology, public health, and health policy.

Stemming from health psychology and behavioral medicine, this handbook is committed to the incorporation of South Asian culture into the science and practice of health promotion and disease reduction in South Asians in the USA. Raised as Asian Americans, we have been exposed to beliefs about health that are rooted in South Asian culture and that possess potential to exacerbate disease risk. More often than not, effective prevention and self-management of chronic conditions obliges long-term, lifestyle changes that are predicated on the adoption of health-promoting beliefs and practices. Combining our professional experiences in health psychology with personal experiences as Asian American individuals of different Asian descent, it became evident to us that the South Asian American patient's system of beliefs about health, illness, and disease should be considered to increase effectiveness of long-term health promotion and prevention/maintenance of chronic conditions. For these reasons, the biopsychosocial model is applied throughout this handbook to consider not only biomedical aspects, but also psychological and sociocultural

aspects of South Asian American conceptualizations of health that can impact the health and chronic disease status of South Asians in the USA.

A note for the reader is to exercise caution due to the nascent and emerging understanding of the health of South Asians in the USA. Although this handbook tends to take a group approach to conceptualizing health, individual differences must not be forgotten. Overall, we hope that the present work helps to facilitate discourse, research, and practice among those scholars interested in the health of South Asians in the USA.

We would like to express our gratitude to all the distinguished collaborators of the present volume for sharing their clinical insights with us and for sharing their passion to improve the health of this Asian subgroup. We hope readers from the present volume will be inspired to learn from these great contributors and gain greater appreciation for the nuanced relationship between culture and health that can guide our understanding of health by continuing to improve upon our existing models of health.

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