

grants have

Korean TV stations and stores that rent Korean videos and taped TV shows. Some of these shows may have English subtitles.

- Explore the resources offered by universities with Korean studies or Korean language programs.

Examples are:

Korea Institute of Harvard University [On-line information]

Available: http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~korea/index_home.html.

Center for Korean Studies, University of California, Los Angeles [On-line information]

Available: <http://www.isop.ucla.edu/korea/>.

Center for Korean Studies, University of Hawaii [On-line information]

Available: <http://www2.hawaii.edu/korea/>.

The Korean Studies Program at the University of Washington [On-line information]

Available: <http://jsis.artsci.washington.edu/programs/korea/korea.html>

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The information in this brief can be provided in accessible format upon request.

NTAC-AAPI Culture Brief Series

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Asian Culture Brief: Korea

A collaborative project between NTAC-AAPI and the Center for International Rehabilitation Research Information and Exchange (CIRRIE) at the State University of New York at Buffalo

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Mission:

To increase employment opportunities for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with disabilities nationwide.

Based at:

University of Hawaii at Manoa, Center on Disability Studies

In collaboration with:

Hawaii Centers for Independent Living

Hawaii Vocational Rehabilitation and Services for the Blind Division

Funded by:

U.S. Department of Education
Rehabilitation Services Administration

The purpose of this brief, developed as part of a series of Asia and Pacific Island culture briefs, is to present readers with a quick overview of the Korean culture and to introduce references that will provide more in-depth perspectives. It is adopted from An Introduction to Korean Culture for Rehabilitation Service Providers (Kim-Rupnow, 2001) with permission from CIRRIE.

Introduction

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (APIs) are one of the fastest growing minority groups in the U.S. The U.S. Census Bureau projects this group to grow from approximately 9.5 million in 1997 to more than 35 million, 9 percent of the U.S. population, by the year 2050—proportionately more than any other minority group in the country. Korean Americans represent 1.1 million of this fast-growing AAPI population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000) and depict basic differences between American mainstream and AAPI cultures. As understanding of these diverse minority cultures increases among service providers, so will their ability to deliver services to AAPIs with disabilities.

A Snapshot of Korean Culture

The essence of Korean culture is harmony with order, contrasted with American mainstream culture that stresses individualism. Influenced by Confucianism, Koreans value harmony within family, community and society as a whole. They have strong ties to family, and value education, hard work, and ambition to excel. Commonly cited virtues in traditional Korea include filial piety, respect for elders, benevolence, loyalty, trust, cooperation, reciprocity, and humility (Hur & Hur, 1999). These traditional values are often challenged, however, by younger generations influenced by western culture.

Korean Immigrants and their Challenges of Adjustment

The language barrier was often the greatest challenge experienced by the first generation of Korean immigrants who began arriving in the U.S. in 1903. Limited English proficiency led to problems such as underemployment, miscommunications with American employers and service providers, and overall difficulty participating in the American mainstream.

Today, cultural differences continue to present additional hurdles that make it difficult for Korean immigrants to adjust to American mainstream culture. One of these differences is the American emphasis on

individualism. Because Koreans emphasize harmony with order, they tend to be influenced by the opinions of other members of their family or community when making decisions. If they make a decision based on their own preferences without considering others, they are likely to be labeled “selfish.”

Family Structure

Koreans regard family as the basic social unit and consider harmony at home the first step toward harmony in the community and in the nation as a whole. Many Koreans consider themselves extensions of their families and often regard the welfare of the family as more important than that of individual members. The roles of family members are based on gender and age. Exchanging roles and sharing power are not encouraged, due to strong beliefs that order and harmony exist when there are distinctions between the roles and duties of men and women. This often results in the husband leading and the wife following. Children are ranked by age, with the younger required to respect the older.

Views on Disability within Korean Culture

It is common for Koreans to embrace a complex mixture of beliefs regarding the causes and treatments of disability, depending mainly on their education, religion, and family background. Koreans who believe supernatural influence causes disabilities tend to feel helpless, depressed or blame themselves or their ancestors when they discover a disability in themselves or their family. They tend to seek little help and leave everything to fate. The person with a disability is often cared for by parents, who usually expect their child to outgrow such conditions. Those with a scientific education believe that disabling conditions may be overcome with appropriate medical intervention, and actively seek medicine, therapy, or surgery from health professionals. Unlike westerners, however, Koreans use herbal medicines, acupuncture, and other natural remedies. In addition, being spiritually oriented, many Koreans using western medicine also offer prayers and conduct religious rituals to regain physical and mental health.

Some Koreans believe that *lifelong* disability is a kind of payback for something they did wrong in the past. As a result, many Koreans with disabilities and their families suffer from shame, helplessness, denial, withdrawal and depression. Many view *acquired* disability as the result of bad luck or misfortune.

The Concept of Independence and Employment within Korean Culture

Because Koreans believe interdependence among family members is more important than independence, they accept the fact that all people need help from others many times in their lives. In particular, dependency of young children, old grandparents, or sick family members is usually expected. Family members feel obligated to take care of their basic needs and to keep up their morale.

Adults with disabilities who have found employment say that work has played a key role in developing their self-esteem and a sense of belonging in society. They do not want to rely on the social welfare system. The sense of pride they have as taxpayers proves even more valuable than the income they bring in. However, obstacles loom large for individuals with disabilities. Though employment and earnings data for AAPIs is not available from the U.S. Census Bureau, of the nearly 28 million Americans between the ages of 21 to 64 who have some type of disability, only half are employed. Of those who are employed, their annual salaries average only 77.6 percent of the national average annual salary. In addition, only one-third of Americans with severe disabilities are employed, and their annual salaries average only 61.6 percent of the national average annual salary. These barriers are even further compounded for AAPIs with disabilities. The U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (2002) states that people with disabilities from culturally diverse backgrounds experience twice the discrimination experienced by non-disabled people in the minority community.

Typical Patterns of Interaction with Service Providers by Korean Consumers

Service providers, whose jobs require higher education and intensive training, are well respected in the Korean community. Consumers tend to listen to their advice and follow their directions as passive recipients. Traditional Korean consumers are not familiar with the American concept of empowerment and they tend to believe that service providers are generally the primary decision makers. Kalyanpur and Rao describe empowerment as “changing the role of a service provider from that of an expert to that of an ally or friend who enables families to articulate what they need” (National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research, 1999). It might not be easy initially to establish a partner relationship with Korean consumers, as defined above, because they are accustomed to a hierarchical relationship. Structured approaches with clear directions and expectations might suit most first-generation Koreans best. Providing many options combined with freedom of choice might not be as widely appreciated as it is in American mainstream culture. In addition, the service provider who offers too many options is likely to be considered incompetent. Korean consumers may be able to collaborate more effectively when given a clear explanation of the pros and cons of a few options.

Recommendations to Rehabilitation Service Providers for Effectively Working with Persons from Korea

The following are general suggestions for building positive and collaborative relationships with consumers who hold traditional Korean values, regardless of their age or type of disability.

(a) Build a Positive Relationship

- Avoid stereotyping and labeling—respect individual differences.
- Use Korean greetings such as “Anyong Haseyo?” (“How are you?”) to build rapport.
- Employ patience to develop open and ongoing communication.
- Provide written information whenever possible since most first-generation Koreans’ reading

skills

are better than their conversational skills.

(b) Involving Consumers and Family Members

- Considering Koreans’ high regard for the opinions of their parents, invite parents into the process from the beginning, especially when making career choices.
- Empower consumers by teaching them their rights and responsibilities.
- Respect healing rituals by consumers and their family members.

(c) Expanding Capacity and Support: The following recommendations are made in the hope of ensuring positive rehabilitation outcomes at a system level by addressing the two most critical support needs of first-generation Korean immigrants with disabilities and their families:

- Be creative in finding interpretation and translation services.
- Provide mental health support.

Ways you can become more Familiar with Korean Culture

• Read books, journals, and newspapers about Korea. You can begin with references used for this brief.

In addition, Korean newspapers written in English include *The Korea Herald*, *The Korea Times*, and *The Korea Economic News Daily*.

- Watch Korean movies, videos, and TV series. Cities with large numbers of Korean immi-