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Authors

Woo, Benjamin KP

Chung, Siubak

Woo, Gina

et al.

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Letter

Mitigating stigma of Alzheimer's disease dementia among Chinese Americans

We read with great interest the article by Stites et al. [1] and commend the authors for analyzing stigma of dementia among 317 adults from the US general public. Their study showed that 55% respondents expected a person with dementia to be discriminated by his/her employers, and approximately 46% respondents expected a person with dementia to have his/her health-care insurance limited. As such, the authors called for public education and policies to address such stigmatized attitudes, particularly among divergent racial and ethnic groups.

In a previous study [2] investigating Chinese-American general public attitudes toward people with dementia, we found that 78% respondents expected a person with dementia to be fired by his employers, but only 14% respondents expected a person with dementia to have his health-care insurance limited. This suggests that a cultural factor, filial piety (respecting one's elders), that is not commonplace in the US general public may be an important theme in the Chinese-American community. Because the effect of filial piety may be especially potent in the Chinese immigrant communities, future studies should examine the effect of filial piety on dementia stigma in Chinese-American immigrant adults. Future studies should also explore what are the effects of social and cultural factors on ageism. Nevertheless, public education is much needed to address the rampant discrimination on the basis of age and health among the Chinese-American general public.

In the study by Stites et al. [1], the authors hypothesized that expected dementia stigma would be less common among African Americans as these respondents were more likely to interact with persons with dementia than white respondents. However, in the Chinese-American general public, we observed that even Chinese Americans with first-degree relatives with dementia subscribed to moderately stigmatizing views about the illness [3]. Because direct contact with persons with dementia may not aid in mitigating stigma among Chinese Americans, other strategies would be needed to reduce dementia stigma, specifically

in Chinese Americans with direct contact with community members suffering from dementia.

Because language barriers may further contribute to dementia stigma, our research group has directly disseminated antistigma programs in the Chinese community. For example, health fairs and workshops to raise awareness and knowledge on dementia in the Chinese community were successful in recruiting Chinese-speaking older adults to further learn about misconceptions regarding dementia [4,5]. In 2015, we produced a culturally sensitive short film to reduce dementia stigma using the Cantonese language. Eighty (89%) of the 90 viewers found the short film to be useful in mitigating dementia stigma [6]. The effect was particularly prominent among individuals with higher baseline dementia stigma, as well as a shorter duration of residence in the United States. Finally, by uploading Cantonese-language video lectures about dementia background, misconceptions, stigma, and prevention to YouTube, we were able to target older Chinese-speaking individuals residing not just in the United States [7] but also across the globe including Australia [8], Britain [9], and Singapore [10]. These studies in combination suggest that there is a huge potential to mitigate dementia stigma in the Chinese communities with culturally sensitive education, particularly using social media to deliver such interventions. Future studies are needed to further understand how to reduce dementia stigma in other racial and ethnic groups through social media.

Benjamin K.P. Woo*

Siubak Chung

Gina Woo

Jamie O.P. Chung

Asian Pacific Health Corps

University of California

Los Angeles (UCLA)

Los Angeles, CA, USA

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*Corresponding author. Tel.: +747-210-3830; Fax: +747-210-3554.

E-mail address: bkpwu@gmail.com

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