

Cross Cultural Newsletter

“Mental Health of Chinese/Asian International Students in Auckland”

Speaker: Professor Max Abbott, Marlene Lu

25th October, 2016

Dear Members,

Re: Newsletter

Time flies. In the twinkle of an eye, we have come to the end of this year's presentations. Last night, as always, we had an attendance of 58 members. The topic was on “Chinese University Students’ Coping and Mental Health: A New Zealand survey”. The speaker was **Professor Max Abbott**. This was followed by **Ms Marlene Lu's** presentation on the **AUT Chinese Centre**, a facility that attempted to address some of the issues described in the research.



The Professor first gave an introduction to the increasing importance of the wellbeing of International students. Followed by this, he described a research conducted among the Chinese Students at the School of Business. This was the first in-depth look into the mental health of Chinese International students. Although almost a decade had elapsed since the research, many of the findings could still apply. Following **Professor's** presentation, **Marlene** described how she and colleagues have organised the **Chinese Centre** in an attempt to address some of the mental and psychosocial issues.

The Professor presented background information to illustrate why the mental health issues have become increasingly important. In the past two decades, there has been an influx of international students to New Zealand. This influx was stimulated by the government's encouragement of transnational migration and export education. The latest numbers of students enrolled at AUT was a total of 3,976 international students enrolled in 2015. Of these 1902 were from China. Unfortunately, the growth rate is not paralleled by a correspondent increase in knowledge about the mental health of Chinese migrants, let alone International students.



Preliminary findings among new migrants indicated that language difficulties, unemployment, underemployment, discrimination, acculturation stresses, low social support and absent parents (in adolescents and young adults) were major risk factors contributing to adaptation problems and mental disorder.

In order to establish means to address possible mental health risk factors, **the Professor** and co initiated a research a decade ago aiming at answering a few key questions viz : the risk factors for experiencing loneliness, hassles and more importantly mental ill health. An attempt was also made to find out whether prevalence of mental disorders were related to language acculturation. Lastly, knowledge about methods how students best cope with the environment and stresses of migration would hopefully shed light on establishing strategies to reduce risk of harm.



For details of the research methodology, please refer to the main presentation. The results seem to suggest that the feeling of shyness, and isolation despite having people around; and more importantly, the number of years in New Zealand contributed to **loneliness**. It was an amazement that **loneliness** affected first and third year students more than second or final. Living with spouse/de facto seemed more stressful than living with parents. In terms of **hassles**, thoughts about the future and concerns about high expectations seemed more worrisome than the feeling of having troublesome neighbours (i.e. personal issues rather than social).

In terms of mental health, using the cut off score of 4 or more for CHQ-12, 31% were identified as probably experiencing a minor **mental disorder**. Important contributing factors to this seemed to be **loneliness** especially of being in the third year, **language acculturation** (being more related to self-proclaimed integrators – ie bilingualism vs integrator (speaking English more fluently); living with spouse and being a non-practising religious person; (probably again related **to isolation and support** rather than faith alone). In summary, **loneliness** (and factors contributing to loneliness such as possible isolation from having a non-practising faith), **having hassles** probably from living with spouse rather than friends, and **personal concerns** about future all seem to have an increase high odds ratio for mental ill health.

As to effective **coping strategies**, international students who successfully coped found that individual strategies such as **distraction, active thinking and active behaviour** seemed to be the most frequent techniques used. Socially, **emotional support** by friends from their own culture was reported to be ones most appreciated.



The above research was followed by **Ms Lu** description of the **AUT Chinese Centre** the operation of which provides a good illustration how the above findings could be applied to facilitate mental wellbeing for all Chinese students. In short, the Centre provides students with orientation as to the administrative and regulatory aspects of AUT e.g. enrolment ; Academic guidance in programme selection and career guidance; practical academic support through facilities for peer tutoring ; and last, but not least, personal support (through mentoring) and programmes to encourage social support through activities.

This latter includes group activities such as camping, skiing and community volunteer work. From a mental health perspective, the combining of practical (academic) help with personal emotional and social support programme is more effective in engaging students. Chinese, being shameful about personal weakness would often be too shy to receive direct mental health counselling. Being a pragmatically orientated culture, the provision of academic support would be most attractive and helped to engage students in other psychosocial programmes organised by the Centre.

The presentation terminated as usual after much discussion.

By the time you receive this newsletter, the recording of the presentation would be on the webcast. For those interested, please contact Diane for the password.

NEXT SESSION: As we approach the end of the year, our next speakers are busy with their work and would only be available to speak to us in February 2017. The topic would be on **“Eating Disorders among Asians”**. This would be followed by case presentations and discussions. Please watch for the flyer near end of January 2017.

Lastly, on behalf of the Cross Cultural Interest Group, I would like to thank you for all your support in the year past and wish you a Merry Christmas and a very successful New Year.



Yours sincerely,

S Wong

For Cross Cultural Interest Group



*For a more accurate rendition of the presentation, **please request the DVD** from Diane Evans at dianee@adhb.govt.nz (please send \$2 stamps to help cover costs). Post stamps to ADHB CMHS, Cross Culture, Bldg 7, Level 4, GCC, Greenlane, 1051.*

For ADHB staff, previous newsletters and flyers can be viewed on the Intranet – click on this link:

http://adhb.intranet/Mental_Health/Resources/CrossCulture.htm