

VOICES OF YOUTH

Stigma, Discrimination and Mental Health



Voices of Youth

Interviews with **Khadeeja Khan** and **Zuhaa Khan**, Coolminds Youth Summit Ambassadors, and **Zita Marie Puentespina**, a Year 10 student

What are your thoughts on how ethnic minorities view mental health, and how is this topic discussed?

Zita: Sadly, many ethnic minorities come face to face with the idea that mental health may be a taboo subject in their upbringing. Moreover, umbrella terms such as “being difficult” or “dramatic” may come into play. This helps delay an individual’s understanding of “mental health” and how they can healthily overcome it.

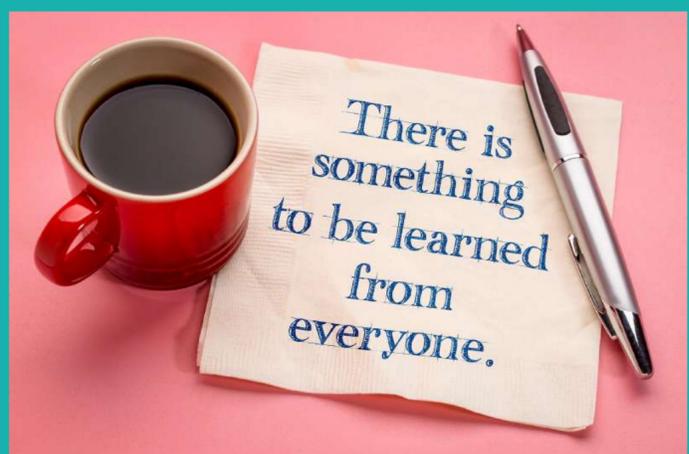
Khadeeja: I think ethnic minorities lack awareness when it comes to mental health. For many, if you cannot see it then it is not there. It is easier to visit a doctor for a bruise you have on your arm than visit the doctor for bruised emotions. In the ethnic minority community, mental health is seldom talked about and that only worsens it further. Common issues like post-natal depression in women are hardly ever discussed because the majority do not even know what it is and many do not how to deal with it. Although the youth are a lot more open to this, parents can be ignorant to talk or even learn about mental health.

Name-calling and shaming with words like ‘mad’, ‘crazy’, ‘attention-seeker’ are common in the minority community. Whilst doing my Psychology degree, I was faced with the same issues as it was considered a subject with ‘no future’ and ‘a waste of time’. So, while the youth are learning about mental health and are opening themselves up, the older ones are still closed off and driving the generation gap further apart. This is mainly because in the countries where the ethnic minority immigrants come from, mental health is a taboo, making it difficult for them to comprehend.

Zuhaa: Unfortunately it’s not prioritised and thrown under the radar for the most part, in my opinion. Until it becomes a visible issue (e.g. drug abuse and dependency). Depression, trauma, anxiety are often viewed as “excuses” and “acts of laziness” so the ones struggling from these challenges are far from receiving help in their own community. Success and making a name out of yourself is constantly deemed significant. As painful and discouraging as this may be, your status and success are measured by your bank balance and the number of properties you own in the EM community. There isn’t much talk about what’s going on in your head and the significance of emotional discomfort.

Issues with racism and discrimination reflect back to one’s identity. In the case of an immigrant child, the “sense of belonging” and “need for assurance” are parts of life that the “average” local is provided with but immigrant children struggle to find. The use of labels and a lack of acceptance, appreciation, and respect can harm mental health and cause long-term detrimental effects on individuals.

As for personal experience, fortunately mine have been subtle compared to what others may have experienced. That said, hearing about troubling tales in your community can hurt your own mental health too. It adds to the emotional stress of constantly thinking “what this place, what do people presume of me” simply based off appearance, ethnic features, clothing etc.



What are some barriers for ethnic minorities who want to seek help?



Khadeeja: The main barrier is independence - many people live with their parents until they get married, so wanting to seek help under the guardianship of their parents would be difficult especially when the parents are not willing to agree or accept their mental health. Additionally, there is the issue of acceptance. Seeking help and being vulnerable would mean that they accept they are going through something and would have to be vocal about it, yet they have been taught to do the opposite their whole lives. Confidence plays a barrier too. When parents, family and society have told them to stay quiet and avoid their feelings, finding the confidence to speak out is hard and will need a lot of perseverance and support. Finally, confidentiality and trust is a huge barrier. Many ethnic minorities in Hong Kong are usually somehow acquaintances, friends or related to each other in other ways. The insecurity of information being 'leaked' to their parents, relatives etc discourages the youth and minorities as a whole about speaking up.

Zita: A barrier I believe is quite evident is the "communication barrier" as this does have an instant strain in one's ability to express themselves and be fully understood. Although an EM may try their best to express their need for help, the receiving person may not understand them, despite the effort the EM may be showing. Due to prevalent language, cultural and inter-generational barriers, I believe acts of compassion and love should be shown louder.



How can we best support mental health for everyone despite cultural differences?

Khadeeja: We can make the ethnic minority community a safe place for them to open up. We can provide a platform for them which would empower them and help them. When other people from different backgrounds come together and speak out, it helps to de-stigmatize mental health and they can feel accepted and validated. We need to realise that although we may have different cultures, backgrounds and religions, the one thing that we can all connect with is our emotions and feelings. Education is vital too, and this should start from schools, which would then be brought to homes. Before I started my Psychology degree, I had minimal information about mental health. My education means that I can help others to get educated too. If we target 100 people, for example, we might not reach out to all of them but even if 50 parents can be educated on mental health, it may be enough to increase support around mental health for at least some people in our community.

Zita: We must have a constructive foundation in which a collection of knowledge about mental health is addressed and shared, this may be in different forms of media. This may be a place where individuals can share their own ideas and tailor the given resources to their own cultural backgrounds, as mental health should not take away from one's culture but should be understood positively in the context of their culture.



Zuhaa: It's crucial to place significance on an individual's culture since cultural influence does play a role in shaping one's life. But we need to just set our differences aside and provide a set of ears to those who come to seek help. The fact is that there's little to no emphasis on mental health in the community, all that there is is the constant denial of mental health as a health issue. This makes it so hard to speak up.



How can youth support other youth who have been victims of racism or discrimination?



Zuhaa: Remind them that it's not their fault. Often times the discriminatory words and phrases used are a reflection of the racist himself. It's a problem that is bred in the racist's mind instead of the victim. At the end of the day, the victim needs to accept that it's impossible to change one's ethical features, the culture and custom they were born in. Spending more time in understanding one's own culture and dwelling on its importance to the advances of the world are far better alternatives than constantly being hard on oneself because of an unfortunate encounter with racism. If possible, also advise the victims to be patient and try their best to spread awareness on what's wrong and what shouldn't be said to people from a different race, etc.

Khadeeja: Youth can support other youth who have been victims of racism and discrimination by speaking up about their own experiences. It's that simple! We need advocates, ambassadors and supporters who can speak up about their own mental health experiences and this will encourage others to do the same. We need societies, groups and events by youth for youth and mental health Coolminds Youth Summit is a prime example of that! The youth can also just contribute their time to mental health charities and organisations and attend the events. The presence of youth at such occasions is enough to encourage other youth to get involved.



Zita: We must acknowledge their experiences, create a safe place for self-expression, and use these experiences to inform the immediate people around them in order to spread awareness. We must create a platform of understanding where people can become informed and then empowered to make a difference.



The lives of people with mental health conditions are often embedded by stigma as well as discrimination.

Stigma is a reality for many people with a mental illness, and they report that how others judge them is one of their greatest barriers to a complete and satisfying life.



Where to Get More Support **A List of Community Resources**

Government Departments:

Support Service Centres for Ethnic Minorities - a list by the Race Relations Unit of the Home Affairs Department

Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres - provide social work intervention for children and youth 6-24

Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness - provide community support, social rehabilitation services, clinical assessment and treatment for those aged 15 or above and their family members or carers.

Government-funded Non-Profit Making Organizations (NPOs):

Christian Action SHINE Centre: Self-help and Mutual-help Groups for ethnic minorities who encounter social and economic problems.

Hong Kong Christian Service CHEER Centre: *Counselling, guidance and referral services are provided by registered social workers for all ethnic minorities in Hong Kong and all organisations serving ethnic minorities, to facilitate their swift settlement in Hong Kong.*

Hong Kong Community Network LINK Centre: Registered social workers offer counselling or referral to appropriate government department or agencies. Specially trained ethnic minority staff offer translation services.

International Social Service: Counselling and Guidance services for ethnic minorities with HKID cards.

New Home Association HOME Centre: Individual and mutual support for all ethnic minorities in Hong Kong

Yuen Long Town Hall Support Service Centre for Ethnic Minorities: Provides counselling and referral service to pertinent organizations, offers emotional support, and gives sessions on problem-solving and stress-management skills for Hong Kong ethnic minority residents aged 9-27.



The Zubin Foundation - Ethnic Minority Well-being Centre (EMWC)

The EMWC serves those in the ethnic minority community who would like to talk to a counsellor about their mental well-being. All counsellors are able to speak English plus Hindi/ Urdu. Counselling service is only available for individuals aged 16 or above. If you have not reached 18 yet, you are required to get your parents' consent in order to receive our counselling service.

- Address: 5/F, Unit F-J, Block 2, Kwai Tak Industrial Centre, 15-33 Kwai Tak Street, Kwai Chung, Hong Kong
- Contact number: 9682 3100 (for enquiries on EMWC and making appointments) / 2540 9588 (general enquiries on The Zubin Foundation)
- Email: info@zubinfoundation.org

Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service - Yau Tsim Mong Family Education and Support Centre

Mutual help groups, individual and family counselling are provided for all ethnic minorities in Hong Kong.

- Address: 5/F, 396 Shanghai Street, Yaumatei, Kowloon
- Contact number: 2781 2921/ 6821 9115/ 6821 9114
- Email: ytmfesc@yang.org.hk

Christian Action (Woo Sung Street Centre)

Self help and mutual help groups for ethnic minorities who encounter social and economic problems.

- Address: 4/F., Lee Kong Commercial Building, 115 Woo Sung Street, Jordan, Kowloon
- Contact number: 3422 3820
- Email: emisc@christian-action.org.hk

The Salvation Army Yau Ma Tei Integrated Service for Young People

Focuses on growth and counselling, to foster a sense of belonging to Hong Kong among the ethnic minority group and help them adapt to life in Hong Kong.

- Address: 1/F Block 4, Prosperous Garden, 3 Public Square Street, Kowloon
- Contact number: 2770 8933
- Email: ymtis@ssd.salvation.org.hk

EMERGENCY SUPPORT

If you are experiencing strong levels of distress or trauma which are interfering with your life, remember that you do not have to face it alone, and that **help is available**.



For emergency support, please contact the hotlines below:

Emergency hotline: 999

The Samaritans 24-hour hotline (Multilingual): (852) 2896 0000

Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong 24-hour hotline (Cantonese only): (852) 2389 2222

Suicide Prevention Services 24-hour hotline (Cantonese only): (852) 2382 0000

OpenUp 24/7 online emotional support service (English/Chinese):

www.openup.hk

More support services can be found [here](#):

<https://www.coolmindshk.com/en/emergency-hotlines/>

More non-urgent support services can be found [here](#):

<https://www.coolmindshk.com/en/communitydirectory/>

For more youth mental health information and resources, check out our Coolminds website. You can learn more about our upcoming events and trainings for parents, teachers and students, and read blog articles and stories written by young people in Hong Kong.

RESOURCES

www.coolmindshk.com

IG: [@coolminds.hk](https://www.instagram.com/coolminds.hk)

FB: [@coolmindshongkong](https://www.facebook.com/coolmindshongkong)



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