

# Cultural Influences on Attitudes towards Chronic Illness



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## Introduction

- Researchers in cultural psychology continue to find evidence demonstrating cross-cultural variations in attitudes towards mental illness (Heine, 2012).
- More specifically, researchers have established that interdependent cultures endorse a greater amount of stigma towards mental illness compared to independent cultures (Ngai et al., 2014).
- Less research has been conducted to investigate the nature of attitudes towards chronic physical illness and whether cross-cultural variations are present.
- Given the increasing prevalence of mental illness and chronic physical illness diagnoses, understanding how culture influences attitudes towards illness allows researchers to gain valuable insight into how individuals behave when faced with illness (Cabassa et al., 2013).
- The current study was designed to unravel culturally influenced understandings of illness in order to gain a deeper understanding of the way culture influences attitudes towards mental illness and chronic physical illness.

## Present Study

- The present study seeks to answer the following question: How does culture influence attitudes towards mental illness and chronic physical illness? We expect to answer this question with the following hypotheses:
  1. Participants will display greater shame and social distance towards mental illness compared to chronic physical illness
  2. There will be a negative correlation between independence and shame and social distance
  3. There will be a positive correlation between interdependence and shame and social distance

## Methods

### Participants:

- Undergraduate students enrolled in Introductory Psychology at University of Toronto, Scarborough Campus
- Self-identified as South Asian (n=83) or East Asian (n=72)

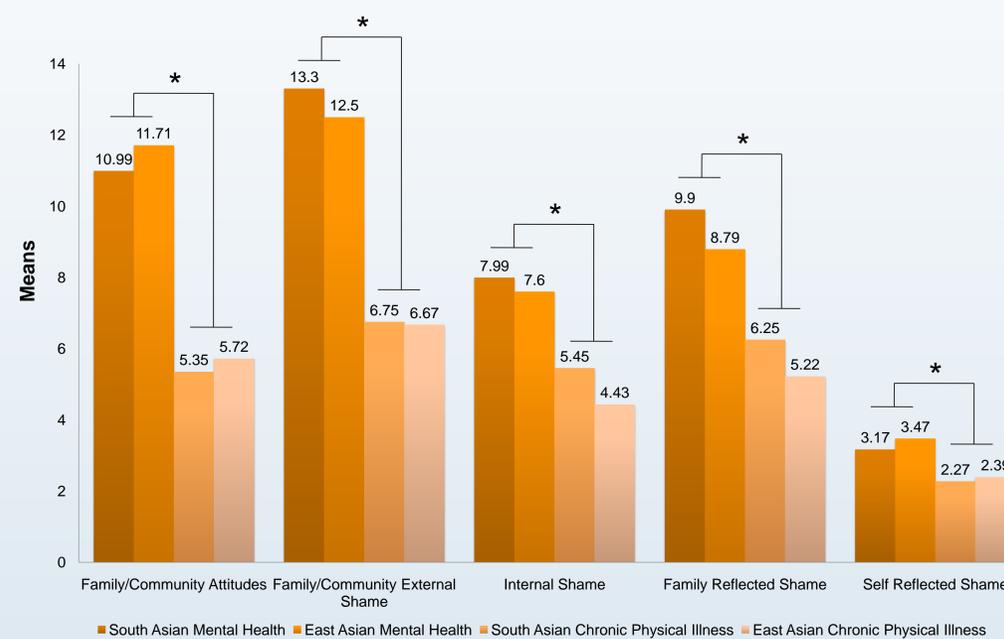
### Measures:

- Attitudes towards Mental Health Problems/Attitudes towards Chronic Physical Health Problems (ATMHP/ATCPHP)
  1. Family/Community Attitudes
  2. Family/Community External Shame
  3. Internal Shame
  4. Family Reflected Shame
  5. Self Reflected Shame
- Social Distance Scale-Mental Health/Social Distance Scale-Chronic Physical Health (SDS-MH/SDS-CPH)
- Self-Construal Scale (SCS)
  1. Independence
  2. Interdependence

## Results

**Figure 1.** Shame scores towards mental illness and chronic physical illness in South Asian and East Asian participants

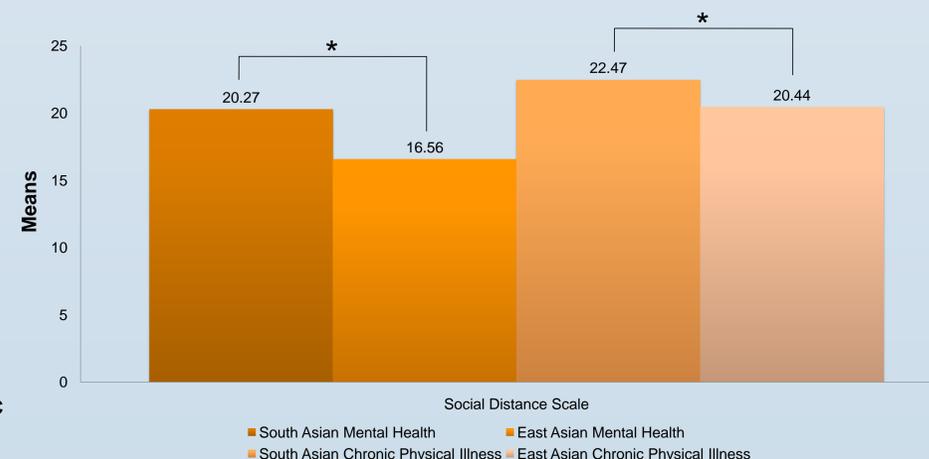
Attitudes towards Mental Health Problems/Chronic Physical Health Problems



2-tailed Paired Samples T-Test. \*p < .05

**Figure 2.** Social Distance scores towards mental illness and chronic physical illness in South Asian and East Asian participants

Social Distance Scale – Mental Health/Chronic Physical Health



2-tailed Paired Samples T-Test. \*p < .05

## Results (continued)

**Table 1.** Correlations between Independent Self-Construal and Shame towards mental illness and chronic physical illness in South Asian participants

Measure	Independent Self-Construal	
	South Asian	East Asian
<b>ATMHP</b>		
Family/Community Attitudes	-.305**	-.163
Family/Community External Shame	-.281*	-.077
Internal Shame	-.303**	-.009
Family Reflected Shame	-.311**	-.042
<b>ATCPHP</b>		
Family/Community Attitudes	-.235*	-.039

2-tailed Bivariate Correlation. \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01

## Discussion

- Regarding shame, both South Asian and East Asian participants revealed greater shame towards mental illness compared to chronic physical illness.
- Regarding social distance, both South Asian and East Asian participants were less willing to interact with individuals with mental illness compared to chronic physical illness.
- These results suggest that attitudes towards chronic physical illness follow a similar pattern as attitudes towards mental illness, although attitudes towards chronic physical illness are much less negative.
- Between-group comparisons reveal greater shame among South Asian participants and greater social distance among East Asian participants.
- An independent self-construal was associated with less shame towards mental illness and somewhat towards chronic physical illness among only South Asian participants.
- These results suggest that among people of South Asian heritage, greater endorsement of Western values is associated with less negative attitudes towards both mental illness and chronic physical illness, with the association being stronger for mental illness.
- The study's results highlight to role of cultural factors in people's attitudes towards both mental illness and chronic physical illness, with implications for clinical care.

## References

- Cabassa, L. J., Humensky, J., Druss, B., Lewis-Fernández, R., Gomes, A. P., Wang, S., & Blanco, C. (2013). Do race, ethnicity, and psychiatric diagnoses matter in the prevalence of multiple chronic medical conditions? *Medical Care*, 51(6), 540-547. doi:10.1097/MLR.0b013e31828dbb19
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