Suicide rate among NY's ethnic women population alarming

Driven often by cultural or linguistic isolation, young Hispanic women and elderly Asian women here are at exceptionally high risk of attempting or committing suicide, mental health experts have warned.

The problem is mainly fuelled by cultural and linguistic isolation, the stress of immigration and a shortage of psychiatric and counselling services, according to advocates who attended a hearing in Lower Manhattan on Friday.

In New York, Asian women 65 and older have a suicide rate of 11.6 per 100,000, more than double the rate for non-Hispanic white women in that age group, according to Dr. Lloyd I. Sederer, the executive deputy commissioner of the city department of health and mental hygiene.

Teenage Hispanic girls are hospitalised for depression at a rate of 388 per 100,000 (compared with 374 for teenage white girls) and are hospitalised after attempting suicide or talking about it at a rate of 95.5 per 100,000 (compared with 88.5 for teenage white girls), according to the New York Times.

The causes of depression in Asian women seem to be less understood. Two advocates at non-profit groups - Ruchika Bajaj of the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families and Sandeep Bathala of Sakhi for South Asian Women - said that mental health services for women from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and other South Asian countries were particularly scarce. Women who are not proficient in English do not get help, Ms. Bajaj said, 'until symptoms reach crisis proportions.'

Similarly, Cao K.O, executive director of the Asian American Federation of New York, said a survey in 2000 of older Asians in the city found that 40 percent reported symptoms of depression. A separate study of the effects of 9/11 on Asians in the city, Cao said, found that they 'largely perceived professional mental health services to be unhelpful, inappropriate or irrelevant.'

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