

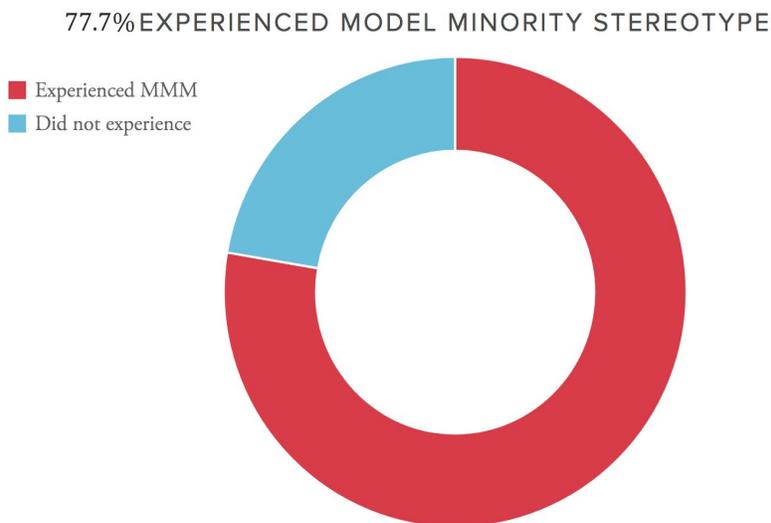


The Data on South Asian American Students' Experiences

The following are selected data findings from Dr. Punita Chhabra Rice's dissertation research on the K-12 experiences of South Asian Americans in U.S. schools. The selected results below illustrate the experiences of South Asian American students, especially as related to the impacts of low teacher cultural proficiency.

The *Myth* of the Model Minority

The model minority stereotype (also called the model minority *myth*) is a perception of Asian students as being perfect: highly intelligent, capable, respectful, and hardworking (Li, 2005; Hirschman & Wong, 1986; Wong, 1980). Many teachers may assume their Asian American students fit this description (including teachers in Dr. Rice's study). In fact, over three-quarters (77.7%) of participants reported their teachers seemed to believe the model minority myth, and seemed to think they were smarter than peers of other backgrounds.



Why is this a big deal?

The "model minority myth" is misguided and misleading, and is a false stereotype (Leong, Chao, & Hardin, 2000). Even if we ignore the implications of a teacher engaging in stereotyping about students, and ignore what belief in the stereotype says about the teachers' general cultural proficiency or multicultural education readiness, the model minority myth is still harmful. The model minority myth hurts Asian American students, whether they are low-achieving or high-achieving, and creates divides between these students and others. It may also lead teachers to provide less support to their Asian American students, as they may believe the students need less support than they actually do.

The Impact of the Model Minority Myth

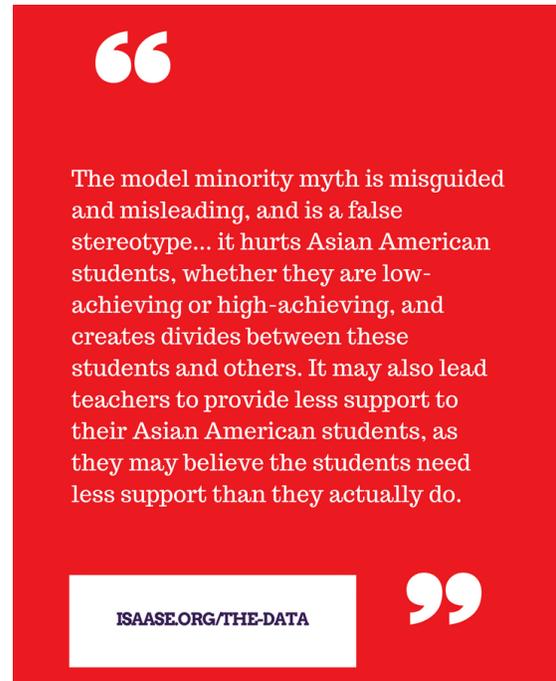
Even if we argue that the model minority myth is a positive stereotype, we need only look at the impact this myth has on lower achieving students, whose needs may be overlooked because of cultural proficiency that could be improved.

Rahman and Paik's (2017) study reports that South Asian Americans in the United States are diverse and varied. In particular, their work shows that occupational trends for South Asian American are bimodal, and while there are many South Asian Americans who may have financial and academic success, a great many South Asian Americans work in lower-wage jobs and have lower academic achievement. This further supports the importance of teacher cultural proficiency, since many South Asian Americans do not fit the model minority stereotype, or may come from families that do not (or are unable to) provide supports that teachers may assume they receive.

Even in the best case scenarios, the highest achieving students still experience greater pressure from teachers (who still do not understand them or may not bother to get to know the students as individuals). Further, they may still be less likely to receive additional supports teachers may

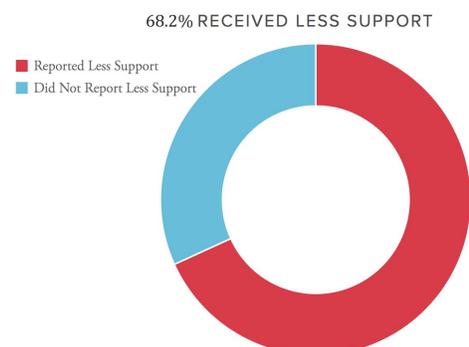
Impact of Cultural Proficiency on Support

Belief in the model minority myth (as well as a tendency to overgeneralize about South Asian/Asian students) may result in a tendency to assume all students from these groups should fit the model minority stereotype, and consequently, may not need general or specific support; this may lead to overlooking these students' needs.



provide other students, and succeed academically *in spite* of having overlooked needs.

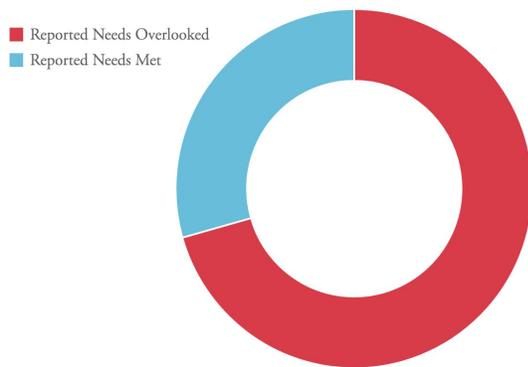
Moreover, the model minority myth creates divides between Asian Americans members of other minority groups (Leong, Chao, & Hardin, 2000). This is consistent with the findings of Lee (2015): the model minority stereotype “promotes interracial tension between Asian Americans and other groups,” including other minority groups and White Americans (p. 2).



In fact, a majority (68.2%) of South Asian American participants in Dr. Rice's study reported that teachers seemed to think they needed less help than their peers from other cultural or racial groups.

For the great many South Asian and other Asian American students who do not fit the stereotype, experience academic underachievement, or have special needs, the model minority myth can be invalid, inaccurate, and harmful, especially if it results in receiving less support than they might actually need. Even for those who are high achieving, it can still present them with a great deal of pressure, including pressure to fit into a particular stereotype, or can compound existing pressure they face from other sources. Moreover, the model minority stereotype creates divides between Asian American and other populations.

70.6% said TEACHERS COULD HAVE BETTER SUPPORTED NEEDS

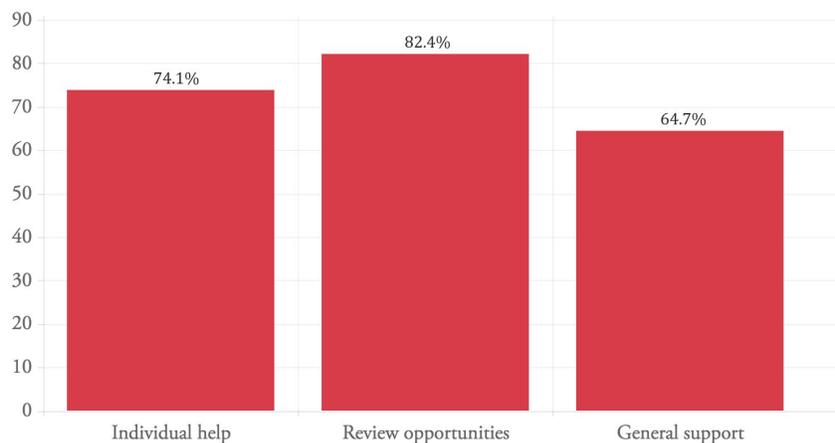


Plus, most of these students do have greater needs than those met by the support they receive. In a constructed response question, most (70.6%) participants indicated that their teachers could have better supported them or their academic needs (see chart). Additionally, a majority (64.7%) of participants felt teachers seemed to believe they needed less help developing time management and organizational skills than peers from other cultural/racial groups (chart not displayed).

Specific Supports Students Needed

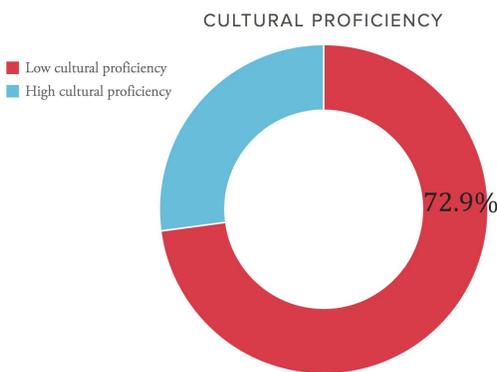
Specific supports participants indicated that they wanted: Individual help, review opportunities, 'general' academic supports.

SPECIFIC SUPPORTS DESIRED BY STUDENTS



Additionally, participants reported wanting supports (that might be best classified as general best practices) related to executive functioning: chunking of instructions and directional information, check-ins on student progress, reminders to write down assignments, support in developing organization/time management skills.

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SUPPORTS DESIRED



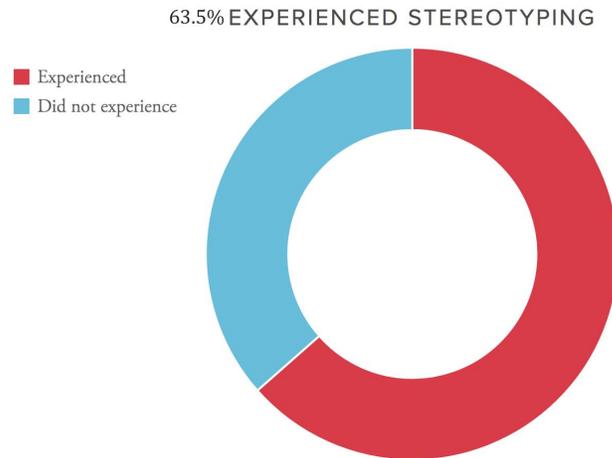
A great majority (72.9%) of South Asian American participants indicated that their K-12 teachers had low cultural proficiency, as measured through an item indicating teachers did not understand the students and their cultural identities or backgrounds.

Moreover, most (81.2%) participants felt teachers knew little about them compared to students from other backgrounds (chart not displayed).

As an aside: Is it possible, that students' perceptions of their teachers' cultural competence misses the mark, and teachers did actually have higher levels of understanding of these students' backgrounds? Certainly. But if this is the perception the students have, what have we really accomplished?

Other Stereotyping

Most (63.5%) participants reported teachers made some kind of assumptions about them based on their backgrounds.



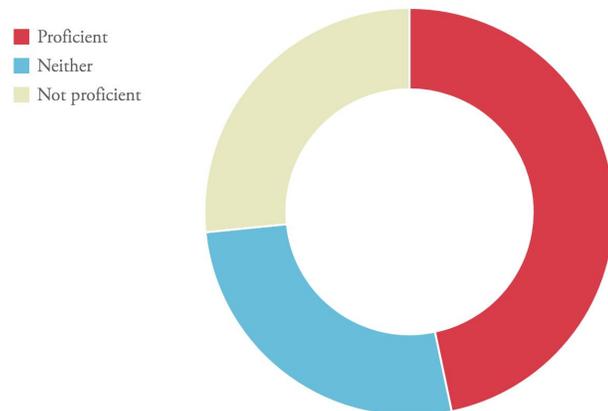
What about teachers' side of the story?

Teachers' Self-Reported Proficiency

Dr. Rice's research also included a very small quantitative survey of teachers (the results are not very generalizable as $n = 15$), in which participants were asked to rate their own level of proficiency as related to South Asian American students. Here are the findings:

- Almost half (47%) of participants reported they were culturally competent related to South Asian Americans
- Only about a quarter (27%) reported they lacked cultural proficiency
- Only about a quarter (27%) reported they were “neutral” (neither lacking proficiency, nor proficient)

TEACHERS' SELF-REPORTED PROFICIENCY



Phrased differently, over half of teachers did *not* identify as culturally proficient related to South Asian American students. Though more research would be valuable and this was a small exploratory study, this is still a big percentage.

A large majority (87%) of teachers also reported that they believed that they could benefit from learning more about South Asian American students (chart not displayed).

Additional findings

- Over half (51.8%) of South Asian Americans reported feeling teachers tended to lump them in with other Asian American subgroups (data chart not displayed)
- Low cultural proficiency was not restricted to schools or areas with a particular demographic breakdown (that is, predominantly White students, minority-majority schools, and schools with high populations of South Asian Americans all shared experiences of teachers with low cultural competence)
- Researchers also find the experiences of South Asian Americans are varied
- Offering resources to combat stereotypes may improve students' experiences

Teachers can visit [ISAASE.org/for-teachers](https://isaase.org/for-teachers) to learn more about how they can help in Improving South Asian American Students' Experiences.