

Beyond Borders: Mental Health Parallels in Canada and Vietnam

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Canada and Vietnam may seem like they are worlds apart, but they might be more similar than one would think. When we think of youth mental health in Canada in comparison to Vietnam, what do we imagine? How does our perception of mental health differ or overlap?

Reader's discretion: this blog was written with the insight and perspective of Canadian and Vietnamese youth who participated in the Y-PRIME collaboration, and only reflects our own experiences and views.

Social Expectations

We may have culturally different expectations or approaches to things, but stigma is prevalent in both groups. In Vietnam, seeking help related to mental health is often met with judgement from others, forcing many people to put up a facade around their relatives/peers. This is more prominent among boys, many of whom still have the traditional "men should not cry" mindset. Regardless, that doesn't imply that such stigmas are non-existent in Canada. Canada has only really just begun to recognize men's mental health. Canadian youth also face a large level of shame in opening up if they are struggling at work or school.

In terms of gender roles, women in Vietnam are expected to be excellent at housework, and some are discouraged from pursuing higher education. Yet, at the same time, expectations for women to be good at both housework and the workplace are gaining

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popularity in Vietnam. In Canada, expectations may depend on what the youth choose to pursue in higher education and career, but the high cost of living in Canada contributes significantly to this stress. The stigma around mental health still exists for both Canadians and Vietnamese and can decrease the likelihood that a youth seeks necessary support.

Mental Health Resources

In Vietnam, professional mental health resources are almost unheard of. It is very rare to find advertisements on billboards or social media in regards to mental health. This is in contrast to Canada, where you may find ads for resources on social media, on the bus, etc. Even when youth can find support in Vietnam, they need to be very wealthy as the costs are not cheap. In Canada, youth can get support for free from Foundry, for example, but if a youth decides to get external support and doesn't have insurance – some youth might not have an income as well – then it can get costly. Friends seem to be the most common resource for mental health support for youth in both Vietnam and Canada. In terms of family as a form of support, this can also vary for both groups and is very situation-based.

Education and Academic Pressure

Academics is something that concerns both groups but it is especially a big concern for Vietnamese youth. It is common to have entrance exams even for primary/middle school and they can be competitive especially since many try to enter the prestigious ones. There is less consideration for extracurricular activities in Vietnam in comparison to Canada, which adds more pressure for youth to earn

Beyond Borders: Mental Health Parallels in Canada and Vietnam

high grades. There's increased pressure on how well one performs in Vietnam with academics, but the stress is seen by both groups regardless.

To conclude, we talked about the differences seen between the two countries, but also the similarities. Despite cultural, social and economic differences, both Canadian and Vietnamese youth face challenges related to mental health, social expectations, education and academic pressure. Recognizing these shared issues can help us improve youth mental health globally.

