Research Seminar Series 4

Speaker: Dr. Lawrence H. Yang
Associate Professor
Medical Centre of Epidemiology
Columbia University

Date: 20 March 2014 (Thursday)            Time: 3:30 pm – 5:00 pm            Venue: GH405

Topic: Culture and how it shapes and protects against mental illness stigma: Empirical illustrations from Chinese groups

Abstract:
Mental illness stigma is known to vary by culture, but there have been few theoretical formulations of how culture shapes how stigma is experienced across cultures. Dr. Yang will present a new theoretical framework of 'what matters most', or the capacities that define what it means to be a full-fledged 'person' in cultural groups, and how this novel framework facilitates identification and prediction of stigma's cultural effects. He will illustrate this theoretical framework with 3 studies: 1) qualitative study of 50 Chinese immigrants with psychosis; 2) national vignette study with 56 Chinese immigrants and 589 European Americans; and 3) experimental memory paradigm with 48 Chinese American and 37 European American college students. These studies provide new evidence that 'threat to lineage' constitutes a threat to 'what matters most' among Chinese groups that exacerbates stigma in this population. These findings have important implications for culture-specific measurement and anti-stigma interventions in Chinese groups.

Speaker’s brief biography:
Lawrence H. Yang, PhD, Associate Professor of Epidemiology at Columbia University, focuses on research in several key areas of psychiatric epidemiology. This includes defining theoretical work on how culture is conceptualized in relation to stigma and implementing interventions to lessen the prevalence and distribution of this disease. Dr. Yang has applied this concept specifically to stigmatized illnesses in China, using empirical data to examine how stigma towards schizophrenia in this setting impedes symptomatic and social recovery. His work has advanced the study of psychiatric stigma among Asian Americans, and Chinese Americans specifically, contributing to epidemiology’s focus on treatment and illuminating the mechanisms that lead to mental health disparities. Dr. Yang will be collaborating with the Center for Asian American Health Disparities Research to develop interventions with psychoses among Asian Americans and provide a national platform for this work. He is also has been awarded an R01 grant from the National Institutes of Health examining the neurocognitive and social cognitive underpinnings of the new designation of a "high risk for psychosis", a potentially transformative new syndrome to detect psychotic signs before symptoms develop into a full psychotic disorder. The findings from his work will help guide the implementation of this syndrome globally. Dr. Yang has forty-three peer-reviewed papers plus 7 book chapters (57% of publications first-authored), including publications in the Journal of Abnormal Psychology, the British Journal of Psychiatry and The Lancet. Dr. Yang has also received eight Early Career Awards, six of which are national, for his work.