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A large percentage of Asian people living in New Zealand are affected by mental illness. This is based on the latest report released by Asian Family Services, which shows over half of Asian people (57.2%) are at risk of depression, with only 56.5% feeling a sense of belonging in their community (Zhu, 2025). Unfortunately, Asian New Zealanders, alongside Māori and Pacific people, are also less likely to utilize mental support services, in large part due to the shame and stigma around mental illness (Chow, 2017). This is the inspiration for my thesis, which uses game design to destigmatize mental illness among Asian people living in New Zealand. The first phase of my research involves investigating the realities of being Asian and living with different mental illness, including, but not limited to: depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder), to find out reasons preventing people from receiving adequate care. The data, collected via an anonymous survey, shows three main barriers: (1) the lack of support from close family members, (2) the high cost of accessing treatment and (3) the lack of cultural competence from doctors. The second phase of my research is using the data to design a video game featuring fictional but realistically written stories that embody the above themes. The overall aim is to illuminate the painful, often hidden experiences of living with mental illness in order to connect both with Asian and non-Asian audiences. By designing the game and listening to players' feedback, I have learned many lessons on: (1) the main causes behind the stigma, (2) the methods to craft emotionally resonant stories, (3) the project's limitations and (4) the most effective ways to help Asian people seek support and find community. These are the lessons I wish to share in my presentation.

Keywords

video game, mental health, game design, Asian New Zealanders, mental illness, stigma

References

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