

A Scoping Review of Mutual-Aid Groups for Substance Use in Asia

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Introduction: Alcohol and other drug (AOD) use is an emerging public health concern in Asia. Although mutual-aid groups are an integral component of the treatment system for AOD use worldwide, studies have been conducted almost exclusively with Western populations. The scoping review aimed to synthesise how mutual-aid groups in East, South, and Southeast Asian populations were locally developed or culturally adapted, and to describe key outcomes.

Method: Cinahl, EMBASE, MEDLINE, PsycINFO, PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science were searched until 9 Nov 2021 with no language restrictions. Original studies published in peer-reviewed journals were included. Asian populations residing outside the regions of interest, and Caucasian populations residing in these regions were excluded. Data searching and screening processes followed Joanna Briggs Institute methodology involving two independent reviewers, and a third reviewer if necessary.

Key Findings: The 45 included studies were conducted in East and South Asia, and none from Southeast Asia. Most studies examined 12-step programs (77.8%), followed by a locally developed program (i.e., Danshukai in Japan; 22.2%). The unique cultural contexts and the adaptations made to the groups were classified into three categories: culture-, language-, and community-related approaches. Included studies also assessed program outcomes and effectiveness, summarised into three types of comparisons: between mutual-aid groups, mutual-aid groups compared to a control group, and mutual-aid groups without a comparison.

Discussions and Conclusions: Patterns across the included studies highlight how culture may influence the way mutual-aid groups are experienced by Asian populations, and how programs could be tailored to be more culturally appropriate.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Findings could help to inform service delivery practices for people from Asian backgrounds attending treatment services to ensure that the program is culturally appropriate. Utilising multi-level approaches could be helpful when initiating or implementing programs for these populations.

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