



Asian American
Psychological Association

Statement in Support of Naomi Osaka & Mental Health Advocacy in the Workplace

Date: June 3, 2021

We, the Asian American Psychological Association, write this statement in adamant support of Naomi Osaka's decision to not appear before international media during the French Open in order to preserve her mental health. Osaka risked her professional career and her income with this decision to advocate for her personal mental health and that of her fellow athletes, especially in the face of toxic and oppressive workplace policies. As a biracial Black and Japanese woman, she has previously and continues to face racism and sexism from the media, both at home and on the world stage. Her openness about her mental health draws attention to mental health conditions that are experienced by many people. There are an estimated 41.5% of adults in the U.S. who have had recent symptoms of depressive and anxiety disorder (CDC, 2021) and 62% of Asian Americans-alarmingly- report unmet mental health needs (Saw et al., 2021). Additionally, a 2016 study found that 30% of the female athletes surveyed reported symptoms of depression, and found symptoms of anxiety and eating disorders were unaddressed.

Osaka's actions highlight the barriers that exist, even for highly successful professionals, to establish boundaries in order to protect their well-being and mental health. Women of color experience a complex intersection of racist and sexist experiences in the workplace, especially when they are treated as a token representative of a marginalized group. Being a racialized token in any context, and especially in highly visible positions, makes one especially vulnerable to experiencing racialized trauma on a regular basis. Osaka's experience as a tennis professional mirrors this research. The penalty that Osaka has experienced by the French Open is, unfortunately, familiar to many people who are discouraged from setting boundaries in their workplaces and fear repercussions for making their mental health challenges public. It is these policies that reify societal stigmas associated with seeking mental health services. We applaud Osaka for standing up against workplace demands that are detrimental to her mental health and urge all employers to consider how workplace policies can actively harm or help the well-being of workers. Employers can support the mental health of employees by providing health insurance with good mental health coverage, as well as flexibility and accommodations to prioritize and support mental health.

We commend Osaka for modeling self-advocacy, self- and community-care. This is not the first time that she has used her platform to address important societal issues. She has openly supported Black Lives Matter, spoken out against anti-Asian racism, and worn face masks with the names of victims of police brutality during the US Open. We stand with her and ask the sports community and all workplaces to look at workplace culture, demands, and policies with an eye toward creating more inclusive and equitable environments that prioritize human wellness.

The primary mission of the Asian American Psychological Association (AAPA) is to advance the mental health and well-being of Asian American communities through research, professional practice, education, and policy.

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RESOURCES

1 in 4 Project: <https://www.1in4project.org/>

- organization for student athletes that works to overcome shame associated with mental health in sports with a focus on self-advocacy

Athletes Against Anxiety and Depression Foundation: <https://www.aaadf.org/>

- foundation that provides resources for those coping with mental issues with a focus on community building

Athletes for Care: <https://athletesforcare.org/?>

- nonprofit by former pro athletes working to advocate for the health of athletes with mental illness

The Players' Tribune Mental Health Awareness Collection:

<https://www.theplayerstribune.com/collections/mental-health-awareness>

- A media outlet for pro athletes to post and share their stories related to mental health
- Notable article: [Dear Black Women](#) by Las Vegas Ace's A'ja Wilson

Mental Health Issues with Female Athletes:

<https://www.mycentraljersey.com/story/sports/2019/01/19/mental-health-issues-female-athletes-focusing-body-while-forgetting-brain/2628472002/>

- British Journal of Sports Medicine, 30 percent of surveyed female student-athletes showed signs of depression.

National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI) Hotline 800-950-6264

<https://www.nami.org/help>

- The NAMI HelpLine is a free, nationwide peer-support service providing information, resource referrals and support to people living with a mental health condition, their family members and caregivers, mental health providers and the public. HelpLine staff and volunteers are experienced, well-trained and able to provide guidance.