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Addressing Anti-Asian Racism in the Era of COVID-19

Next Steps for a Research Agenda

The Asian American[1] community is a diverse and fast-growing racial group in the United States. In 2019, the 23.2 million people in the United States who identify as Asian American reflect 19 different Asian-origin groups, with Chinese Americans being the largest, followed by Indian Americans and Filipino Americans.[2] Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) populations also have seen significant increases, especially in the South.[3] Despite this growth, Asian American and NHPI communities remain largely invisible and some of the least-understood population groups. This may be attributed in part to extremely low levels of research investment. For example, on health and biomedical research alone, the National Institutes of Health invested only 0.17 percent of its budget over the past three decades to researching Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs).[4] Philanthropic grantmaking bodies have also given relatively low priority to AAPI populations.[5]

In 2020, as the world experienced the once-in-a-century disruption brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, many Asian Americans became targets of widespread anti-Asian racism. For the purposes of this report, we define *anti-Asian racism* as discriminatory acts committed against people who are perceived to be Asians living in the United

KEY FINDINGS

- Stakeholders stated that public anxiety and fear during the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States, along with negative rhetoric about Asians by prominent politicians and public officials, triggered the recent wave of anti-Asian hate.

- Stakeholders described that personally mediated anti-Asian attacks occurred in the context of long-standing systemic racism—a persistent undertone for the rise of anti-Asian attacks.

- Interviewees revealed that although the recent rise of anti-Asian attacks has produced widespread fear and anxiety in the Asian American community, it also has galvanized newfound alliances and resilience.

- Stakeholders identified several strategies to fight anti-Asian racism, including improving the reporting of hate incidents and increasing public education about AAPI history and contributions.

- To reduce racial inequities and better target services needed by AAPI communities, interviewees expressed that funding priority should be given to collecting race- and ethnicity-specific data.

The recent wave of anti-Asian racist incidents highlights an urgent need for strategies to reverse the historical neglect toward the AAPI community by research and policy leaders and to build resilience and support resources for the AAPI community.

States, Asian Americans, and people belonging to AAPI subgroups who appear to be of Asian descent. Between March 19, 2020, and June 30, 2021, about 9,081 reports of COVID-19–related racially motivated incidents against AAPIs were reported across the United States.[6] National polls indicated that AAPIs reported higher levels of experience with hate crimes or hate incidents than the national average in both 2020 and 2021,[7] with about one in four AAPIs affected overall.[8] *Anti-Asian hate crimes and incidents* (including avoidance, verbal harassment, civil rights violations, and physical assault) increased by 149 percent in 2020, according to police data from 16 of the largest U.S. cities.[9] Social media data also indicate that anti-Asian sentiment increased after the outbreak of COVID-19,[10] with about four in ten Americans reporting in June 2020 that "it was more common for people to express racist views about people who are Asian than [it was] before COVID-19."[11]

Numerous studies have also documented increased experience, anticipation, and perception of racial discrimination related to COVID-19 among AAPI in general and Asian subgroups specifically,[12] such as Chinese American families.[13] Few empirical studies examined the impact of these attacks on health and mental health.[14] One study found that a higher level of perceived discrimination related to COVID-19 across dimensions (e.g., online, in person) was associated with poorer psychological well-being (e.g., experience of depressive and anxiety symptoms in both Chinese American parents and youth at the beginning of the pandemic).[15] There is a paucity of

both quantitative and qualitative data to document the impact of anti-Asian racism during COVID-19 on affected communities and of mitigation strategies that have been used to counter the attacks.

Amid the increased hate incidents during the pandemic, some AAPI communities have also faced COVID-19–related health inequities.[16] In some states and cities (e.g., Nevada, New York City) where data about Asian Americans and NHPIs are available, Asian Americans and NHPIs have disproportionately high COVID-19 mortality rates relative to the respective population size. For instance, in California, the COVID-19 mortality rate for NHPI in 2020 was much higher than the state's and for other major racial and ethnic groups.[17] Numerous social determinants of health (e.g., poverty, language and literacy skills) and existing health disparities (e.g., cardiovascular risks) known to affect specific subgroups are believed to explain the elevated COVID-19 mortality rate in specific parts of the country and in Asian American and NHPI subgroups.[18]

The recent wave of racist anti-Asian incidents highlights an urgent need for strategies to reverse the historical neglect of the AAPI community by research and policy leaders and to build resilience and support resources for this community. Existing research has not focused much on understanding the impact of anti-Asian hate on affected communities and mitigating strategies to respond to hate incidents that have been used or would be helpful, particularly through gathering perspectives of community stakeholders. Our research aims to understand

communities' responses to the recent wave of anti-Asian hate during the COVID-19 pandemic and to identify what information and research community stakeholders believe could improve policymaking. We also intend to identify how research could help fill these information gaps and explore mitigating strategies to address anti-Asian racism and hate. Community stakeholder voices are critical to understanding community priorities, consistent with the principles of community-based participatory research (CBPR). CBPR begins with understanding that the research topic (in this case, responses to rising anti-Asian hate during the pandemic) is important to the community, with the goal of combining knowledge with action to bring about social change. Our findings can support planning for future community-based research on this topic and provide useful directions for important policy areas.

Approach

Interviews with AAPI Community Organizations

We conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 members of national or local organizations in California serving AAPI communities. We focused on California-based local organizations because the state has the largest Asian American population in the United States (about 6.7 million people in 2019) and the largest NHPI population outside Hawaii.[19]

We selected national organizations that are broadly representative of AAPI communities. We also chose local community organizations in California based on the size of specific Asian American subgroups in the U.S. population, including Chinese Americans (23 percent of the Asian American population, or 5.4 million), Indian Asian Americans (20 percent or 4.6 million), Filipino Americans (18 percent or 4.2 million), Vietnamese Americans (2.2 million), Korean Americans (1.9 million), and Japanese Americans (1.5 million). Although we contacted organizations serving Filipino and Japanese Americans, we did not receive responses within the study period. We also included organizations representing NHPI communities regardless of their population size. Local community

The voice of community stakeholders is critical to understanding community priorities, consistent with the principles of community-based participatory research.

organizations also represented other specific groups of focus (such as the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer [LGBTQ] community) and those providing social and health services.

Sampling

We used two sampling strategies simultaneously. First, we used a referral-based snowball sampling strategy. Second, a national organization that tracked activities by AAPI organizations to counter anti-Asian racism and hate during the pandemic provided us with a database of AAPI organizations based on their social media and online posting of relevant events and activities (e.g., website, social media [Facebook, Twitter, Instagram]). We then randomly selected California-based organizations stratified by specific subgroups (e.g., young people, older people, women, LGBTQ people, AAPI in general, Chinese, South Asian, other East and Southeast Asian communities) to recruit representatives to interview. The snowball sampling and random selection were done simultaneously because of the short time frame of the project. The RAND Corporation's institutional review board approved the sampling design and study protocol.

Recruitment

We invited 31 organizations (via email and phone) to be part of the study. In some cases, we were connected through existing contacts at an organization; in others, interviewees referred us when we asked for additional contacts to interview. We conducted a total of 20 interviews representing 20 different organizations between April 23 and July 22, 2021. Interviewees received a $50 gift card as an honorarium for their participation.

Semi-Structured Interviews

We developed a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix A) covering several topics:

1. the organization's history, mission/goal, and population served
2. perceived causes of anti-Asian racism and hate incidents during the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of anti-Asian racism and hate, and mitigating strategies that are employed or recommended
3. sources of information used or needed to address anti-Asian racism and hate
4. each organizations' partners and collaborators.

All interviews were conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams or Zoom.

Most of the interviews were 60 minutes; two were 30 minutes. All were audio recorded and transcribed to obtain verbatim quotes.

Rapid Analysis

We used a rapid qualitative analysis approach for data analysis because of time and resource constraints.[20] We took detailed notes for each interview using a template based on key topics of interest from the interview guide. We developed a preliminary conceptual framework early on to summarize key findings as we identified them. We met regularly to pinpoint emerging constructs in the context of the conceptual framework, which we then used to guide later interviews to focus on questions and topics that were less discussed. After each interview, we added detailed findings and new content and ideas under each key finding. This process allowed us to quickly and effectively organize the large amount of data collected and, importantly, to identify gaps in knowledge where future research may add value.

Key Findings

Interviewees Represented a Broad Range of Organizations and Interests

The 20 interviewees represented various national and local organizations—from providers of health and social services to civic engagement and advocacy groups (Table 1). The organizations serve diverse AAPI communities—from ethnic communities (e.g., Chinese, Korean, South Asian) to specific populations (e.g., youth, women, sexual and gender minority individuals). We now present our key findings and relevant sub-findings, along with illustrative quotes.

Perceived Causes of Anti-Asian Racism

Recent Anti-Asian Racist Incidents Were Largely Triggered by COVID-19–Related Fears

Nearly all interviewees confirmed the significant increase in anti-Asian hate incidents in the United States since 2020. Some noted that it was not clear whether there had been a rise or a dramatic spike in actual violence because few data sources tracked anti-Asian hate incidents prior to the pandemic. Several interviewees emphasized that media attention to the wave of attacks was new but that the phenomenon of public violence against Asians had "existed since our people arrived as settlers and as migrants and refugees onto this continent."

Most interviewees considered the incidents to be directly related to the anxiety and fear associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and racist rhetoric of prominent U.S. politicians. Because COVID-19 was first identified in China, people of East Asian descent who appear to be of Chinese origin (i.e., even those who are not Chinese) encountered discriminatory

TABLE 1
Organizations Interviewed

Organization Type	Service Area	Population Served
National organization	Health, public policy, and advocacy	AAs and NHPIs
National organization	Leadership development, public policy, and research	NHPIs
National coalition of AAPI organizations	Civil rights, communications, education, health, housing and economic justice, immigration, and public policy	AAs and NHPIs
National foundation	Funding (supporting AA movement)	AAPIs
National foundation	Education about Asian immigration history	General public
National leadership organization	Civic engagement, international relations, and public policy	Chinese Americans
National leadership organization	Leadership development	AAPI women
Research organization	Demographic data and policy research	AAPIs
CBO in Northern California	Civil rights	AAPIs, particularly immigrants
CBO in Northern California	Health, legal services, public policy, and wellness	Indians and Indian Americans
CBO in Northern California	Civic engagement, community safety, ecological justice, healing, and leadership development	Transgender, nonbinary, and queer AAPIs
CBO in Northern California	Civic engagement, civil rights, healing, public policy, and youth support	Youth of color
CBO in Southern California	Civil rights and legal services	AAs and NHPIs
CBO in Southern California	Civic engagement, health, and leadership development	Southeast Asian youth
CBO in Southern California	Civic engagement, civil rights, and health	LGBTQ AAPIs
CBO in Southern California	Mental health, well-being, and healing	All populations, with a focus on AAPI immigrants and refugees
CBO in Southern California	Civil rights, education, leadership development, and public policy	Korean Americans
CBO in Southern California	Mental health	All populations, with a focus on AAPIs
CBO in Southern California	Health, economic development, social services, and youth support	Chinese Americans
Coalition of CBOs in Southern California	Advocacy and civic engagement	AAPIs, focusing on disadvantaged groups (e.g., immigrants, refugees)

NOTE: AA = Asian American; CBO = community-based organization.

incidents in restaurants, on public transportation, in schools, and in health care facilities across the country since the beginning of the pandemic. Participants perceived that the former U.S. president's inflammatory rhetoric, such as calling COVID-19 the "China virus" and "kung flu," normalized the use of racist sentiments. Asian American community organization stakeholders whom we interviewed strongly criticized such behaviors that aimed to score political points from pandemic fears by sacrificing Asian Americans' rights, safety, and well-being.

A leader of a national coalition of AAPI organizations said,

> There was a signal to the country that blaming people who look Chinese was okay and, for many people, they're not going to . . . distinguish between Chinese Americans or other Asian Americans.

Interviewees also Pointed to Longer-Term, Underlying Causes of Anti-Asian Racism

In addition to more-recent sources of anti-Asian hate incidents, most interviewees pointed to underlying, systemic causes of anti-Asian racism. Organization leaders observed that two stereotypes have long defined Asian American identity. The first is the "model minority" stereotype, in which Asian Americans are perceived to be studious, wealthy, healthy, self-reliant, submissive, obedient, and not needing assistance. The stereotype also sees Asian Americans as people who never complain and mind their own business, and these characteristics are held up as examples of how all communities of color should operate. Interviewees considered the model minority stereotype to be a double-edged sword because it is largely based on historic achievements of East Asians in the United States and does not acknowledge the diversity of experiences in the Asian American community. By obscuring the vast diversity among AAPI groups, the model minority myth strengthens the false belief that, as one interviewee said, "Asian Americans do not need support from the government and society," therefore perpetuating the underfunding of Asian community development and services.

A community organizer of an organization serving youth of color said,

> The model minority myth has been really harmful . . . because it tries to pit Asians against other community members when we are all being oppressed. It's also harmful because a lot of the times who's being lifted up is often East Asians. And there is a hierarchy between different Asian ethnic groups, and there has not been enough attention to AAPI

groups who are being criminalized and refugee AAPI folks . . . [it] really tries to water down the experiences of the Asian community . . . because of that, unfortunately, people have not been putting in the research and effort that they need to support the AAPI communities.

Many interviewees mentioned another common stereotype, which runs counter to the model minority stereotype: the belief that Asians are "perpetual foreigners." This stereotype refuses to consider Asian Americans as fully American, regardless of how long they and generations before them have lived in the United States. Interviewees raised evidence of this stereotype, ranging from recent events in which Asian American journalists were not trusted to report on the Atlanta shootings at Asian spas in 2021 to historical U.S. legal and political actions, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1875 and Japanese American internment during World War II.

Interviewees also discussed the roots of persistent systemic racism, emphasizing historical discrimination toward certain Asian ethnic groups. For example, a leader of a coalition of community organizations in California noted that anti-Asian attacks are not just "acts by individual perpetrators" but also "government policies that have driven that [racism against Asians]. The 'yellow peril' manifested itself in the Chinese Exclusion Act, the 'dusky peril' against South Asians, and the Asiatic Barred Zone Act of 1917," along with countless other historical examples. A leader from a mental health care agency focusing on serving AAPI individuals said that "there has been no other group I can think of that's had ongoing and consistent legislative restrictions on their ability to a come into the country and be to get citizenship." Other interviewees, especially younger people, were more likely to attribute such

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Interviewees also commented that waves of anti-Asian racism and hate usually flare when U.S. internal economic competition (such as for jobs and resources) and international geopolitics intensify. A leader of a national coalition of AAPI organizations said,

> The geopolitical reality is that China is a direct competitor to America in many contexts. Because of that, this [anti-Asian hate] has been exacerbated. We saw that with the murder of Vincent Chin obviously in terms of the tensions that existed with the Japanese auto industry. There are these patterns that it's difficult to argue otherwise that all of these things are informed by broader global tensions that exist.

Community Impact

Anti-Asian Incidents Negatively Affect AAPI Communities

Interviewees described how anti-Asian hate incidents have affected their communities negatively. Various interviewees cited increases in reported harassment that they had heard about in the media but also pointed to "heartbreaking" incidents of well-publicized physical violence as directly contributing to a general sense of fear, particularly among older Asian Americans. This fear discouraged many community members from moving freely in public, leading many to become more isolated. A leader from

a foundation supporting Asian American causes said, "I'm personally more scared, also scared for mom and dad. Every East Asian person I know feels that." Along with this fear, interviewees expressed a sense of "collective frustration" at long-standing rhetoric and violence directed at Asian Americans, which add to a sense of being perpetual and convenient targets for demonization.

This impact was felt strongly in specific settings, such as schools. One interviewee described a well-publicized incident at a Los Angeles middle school in which a student was shouted at, called a COVID-19 spreader, and told to go back to China. Interviewees also expressed concern about housing, including racial bias among landlords, particularly given expiring eviction moratoriums.

Recent Anti-Asian Incidents also Galvanized AAPI Communities

Despite these challenges, interviewees asserted that the rise of anti-Asian hate incidents had also led to positive change. One interviewee said that anti-Asian hate had "galvanized us as a community." Some interviewees described that it had spurred internal discussion and recognition within the AAPI community about using inclusive language, such as "Stop AAPI Hate," and what such phrases mean in practice for each AAPI subgroup included in *AAPI* (e.g., whether it centers certain subgroups that may be affected in different ways). Several interviewees described the AAPI community as a whole, and certain segments specifically, as having realized the importance of visibility and advocacy, which contrasted with traditional Asian stereotypes of being passive or quiet. A leader of a foundation

preserving Asian American immigration history said,

> The silver lining is that the AAPI community is recognizing the importance of being visible, vocal, and responding to attacks rather than . . . saving face or not saying anything. There is a lot of organizing taking place to raise attention and call out injustices.

Another positive impact on the community may be increased recognition among the AAPI community of discriminatory and racist experiences that people belonging to specific Asian subgroups (e.g., South Asians) have long faced (e.g., prejudice after the attacks on September 11, 2001), as well as the experiences of other marginalized groups. A leader from a foundation supporting Asian American causes stated that it was "important that East Asians now feel [fear] and connect it to what South Asian and Black communities and women have felt."

A leader from a foundation preserving Asian American immigration history noted that this development has led progressive segments of the AAPI community to view themselves as in "allyship with other communities," which has led them to take concerted efforts to "be mindful of not using these attacks or coverage of them to drive further wedges between historically tense relationships with the African American community."

Interviewees Observed Generational Differences in Response to Anti-Asian Incidents

Most interviewees described differences in how people responded to anti-Asian hate incidents depending on age, cultures, and ethnicities.

As a leader of a mental health service center serving AAPI individuals pointed out,

> The ideology is very different; the first and second generation look at the issues very different. Second generation [focuses on] justice and injustice and just a lot of advocacies. First generation tends to withdraw more and "let's not create any problems, any more problems, let's not get visible, because you might get attacked."

A leader of a national coalition of AAPI organizations noted,

> Younger Asian Americans tend to be more progressive in the response to this racism. They see the connection between COVID-19 anti-Asian racism and state-based violence against Southeast Asians and deportation. For example, making that connection or understanding the struggle against anti-Asian racism is inextricably linked to the movement for Black lives and that white supremacy culture is sort of at the root of all of that.

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Experiences and Impact May Vary Depending on the Specific Subgroup

Interviewees from organizations serving the NHPI population specifically or AAPI populations generally discussed whether the NHPI community has been affected directly by the recent targeting. One interviewee noted that some Pacific Islander advocates felt that the NHPI community was not directly affected by anti-Asian rhetoric, but national polls showed that NHPI individuals also have experienced elevated hate incidents during the pandemic. Some interviewees suggested that the needs of NHPIs are vastly different from AAPI communities at large. A leader of a national organization serving NHPI populations said that disparities relating to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic affected the Pacific Islander communities more than hate incidents:

> The reality for the PI [Pacific Islanders] community, where the most devastating impact had been, is actually in contracting COVID-19 . . . the PI community had the highest infection rates of any racial or ethnic group. At one point in L.A. County alone, PIs were 12 times more likely to contract COVID than our white counterparts.

Mitigating Strategies

Interviewees discussed strategies for mitigating different forms of anti-Asian racism, from overt racism and discrimination toward individuals (e.g., microaggression, physical and verbal attacks) to persistent and structural racism that affects the entire community and particularly vulnerable subcommunities. As one interviewee said, "Each of the parts of the spectrums [of anti-Asian hate] might have a different potential solution or potential issue." We detail these potential mitigation strategies in the next subsections.

Improve the Incident-Reporting System

Many interviewees mentioned the persistent and severe underreporting of hate incidents from the

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AAPI community. One interviewee suggested that structural racism, including the model minority framing, "are actual disincentives to reporting and basically telling the world you've been discriminated." Interviewees mainly shared two pathways to improve reporting systems. One was to improve the reporting system of hate crimes and incidents within the current justice system. This could involve ways to increase victims' willingness to report, such as reducing language barriers and improving the community's trust of law enforcement. Interviewees suggested a second approach: to develop an innovative and standardized reporting system for hate incidents that occurred in specific locations and contexts, such as on public transit, in the school system, and in the workplace (in other words, outside the justice system).

Educate the General Public, Including Decisionmakers, About the AAPI Community

Interviewees described the need to provide education and learning resources to the public, including leaders and decisionmakers, to improve understanding of the AAPI community in the United States. This would include clearly identifying hateful and racist language and behaviors (including the indirect, subtle discriminatory behaviors known as *microaggressions*) experienced by Asian Americans across different sectors (e.g., school, corporations, government). For leaders and decisionmakers, this means being mindful that language that is used in

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discussions about China policy does not fuel anti-Asian hate in the United States. A leader of a national coalition of AAPI organizations explained,

> We welcome debates on China and broader global geopolitical issues. But when describing China in a way that can be used to actually encourage anti-Asian racism here in the country, we think leaders ought to be much more careful with doing that, and it's not about defending China or the Chinese government, but it's actually about defending Asian Americans here in the country.

Furthermore, the Asian American community needs to have increased and more accurate visibility in society; this could be accomplished through authentic media representations of AAPI people and increased education about Asian American and NHPI history in K–12 schools. Although certain Asian Americans may be perceived as financially well-off, a leader from a national organization said that "there also needs to be education [about] the fact that we are not a monolith when it comes to economic success as well." Interviewees also discussed the need to provide linguistically appropriate learning resources to first-generation Asian immigrants about U.S. civil rights movements and racial issues, because many first-generation immigrants are not aware of the historical and contemporary racial context in the United States.

Provide Direct Assistance and Services to AAPI Communities

Interviewees suggested that AAPI communities need more resources to provide direct support and services to victims of hate incidents, including translations and services related to mental health, immigration, and legal issues. A leader from a coalition of community organizations said,

> More resources at the community level [is recommended], so that resources to go to community groups that can provide direct assistance . . . after the Atlanta shooting, what families wanted and needed was direct help that is culturally and linguistically appropriate, [including] mental health care, access to legal assistance, immigration help. All these things that really can be best provided by nonprofit organizations that are in the community, understand the community.

Several interviewees from organizations that provide direct assistance and services cited challenges to addressing anti-Asian hate incidents. The biggest challenge is limited funding, for example, to cover staff time to complete necessary training related to addressing anti-Asian hate incidents and for Asian American service providers to process the experiences of discrimination they themselves may face (e.g., Asian American service providers also experience discrimination from patients or clients). In addition, small CBOs cited challenges with their capacity to provide services, obtain grants and funding, and collaborate with other organizations. A leader from a small community organization serving LGBTQ AAPIs said,

I'm trying to create a different strategy for our funding so that we're more reliant on grants rather than on individual or major donors because those can be rather unreliable. The struggle for us is that we're a very small organization. The problem that we have as a small organization is that whenever there is funding available, we don't get that funding . . . because either the application is onerous, or we don't have the capacity to give the information that they're looking for. The foundations that we work with are ones that understand that in order for smaller organizations to be sustainable and keep doing the work that they're doing is to make these application process not as burdensome as possible, not requiring extensive reporting.

Identify Grassroot Solutions and Build Relationships

Interviewees identified novel community-based solutions to address anti-Asian hate incidents, including using alternatives to policing (e.g., community patrols for safety in neighborhoods and on public transit), building greater trust between community and law enforcement, increasing civic engagement and representation in justice systems, building coalitions across racial and ethnic communities, and promoting a unified voice for Asian American communities. Several interviewees commented on the importance of building better relationships and unity with other racial and ethnic groups to counter stereotypes and misconceptions of Asian Americans and to jointly fight against injustices. One interviewee from a youth organization said that "cultural healing and bringing communities together so that folks know that our communities are not against each other."

A leader of a national organization focusing on AAPI health and public policy advocacy highlighted the importance of building relationships between community and government agencies:

This is all about relationship building from a community perspective . . . but also from a government perspective, particularly at the local level, state, and then federal. It is very important for us to grow relationships with our law enforcement agency. You have to have that partnership and before the crisis happens so that you know each other, and you can enhance and create additional opportunities for community engagement townhalls and address allocation of resources.

Promote Policy and Long-Term Changes to Address Root Causes of Anti-Asian Racism

Some interviewees applauded new legislation, such as the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act,[21] while others expressed concern that increased police presence would not be the best solution for some Asian communities that historically have not had good relationships with law enforcement and for members of other communities of color because of their experiences with police brutality.

Beyond addressing specific hate incidents, most interviewees pointed to the neglected issue of systemic racism, emphasizing the importance of addressing persistent and long-standing health, education, socioeconomic, and environmental inequities affecting vulnerable AAPI communities. A leader of a CBO serving the Southeast Asian community noted the importance of providing more support and addressing existing inequities in vulnerable Asian subgroups, saying that "Chinatown is one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city [of Los Angeles], and the socioeconomic issues faced by our residents are more similar to what Skid Row residents deal with."

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Some interviewees also mentioned economic tensions as the root cause of violence and discussed the need to reduce overall economic despair and violence in society, as well as to promote cultural change within the Asian American communities (e.g., Asian Americans should advocate more for themselves, for example, at the workplace) to reduce anti-Asian racism.

Using an Intersectional Lens to Address Anti-Asian Racism

To address anti-Asian racism, several interviewees highlighted the importance of applying an intersectional lens to both race- and ethnicity-related issues. They also said an intersectional lens was needed for other matters relating to social class and immigration status. A leader from an organization serving underserved urban Asian ethnic communities said,

> If [anti-Asian racism] only talks about race and it doesn't talk about class, immigration status, colorism, then it becomes another case of like basically the privileged AAPIs dominating the conversation and pushing everybody to narrowly define what racism is and what it looks like.

Data and Research Gaps

Interviewees described various knowledge gaps where additional data could be beneficial. They also suggested potential data-collection methods.

Collect More and Better Disaggregated Data

Multiple interviewees cited disaggregated data (i.e., data broken down by subcategories) for different Asian ethnicities and subgroups across a variety of domains (e.g., health, socioeconomic status, educational achievement) as a critical and long-standing data gap. Disaggregated data also could help shed light on the characteristics and needs of intersectional Asian subgroups (e.g., sexual and gender minority groups, women, immigrants, refugees, prisoners) and help dispel the misperception of Asian Americans as a monolith. As a leader of a national coalition of AAPI organizations said,

> The fact that we still fail to collect accurate data on different Asian American communities and Pacific Islander communities is really [bad] . . . the death rates [of COVID-19] we're seeing, and the disproportional impact is a function of the fact that we've ignored health disparities in our communities for so long. The government has not invested in that data collection that's necessary. And certainly, those disparities have not informed policymaking. And so unfortunately that's the reality we face when you ignore health disparities for generations, when something terrible like this [pandemic] happens, they're going to pay the price.

A leader of a national organization focusing on AAPI health and public policy observed:

> If I happen to live in the state of Florida, for most of the public health information, I would be captured in the category of "other," and I'd like to think I count more than just

being folded into this generic, nondescriptive category of "other."

Two interviewees noted that better data could help to justify the need for additional funding, such as from city, county, or state grants. A leader from a community organization serving gender and sexual minority AAPIs questioned why such justification was needed: "While having data is always good, there is a question of why the AAPI community needs to prove that this is happening when so many historical events point to this racism and bias." Another interviewee suggested that better data could help bring different organizations together to address shared causes. Such data could support shared narratives that could help mitigate cross-cultural tensions.

To reach specific subgroups and thus build disaggregated data sets, some interviewees suggested ways to meet people where they already lived and communicated. Surveys, albeit expensive, could be designed for certain populations and could focus on relevant topics, languages, and locations where they are fielded. The use of social networks (e.g., Clubhouse) to reach out to younger generations where they are already discussing their needs was also a suggestion.

Additional suggestions included creating data-collection standards (e.g., common definitions of hate incidents), considering how to create actionable measures, and identifying a full range of stakeholders, including funders and those who could be responsible for data collection. Interviewees named several potential entities that could be responsible for this data collection, including the National Institutes of Health, state chambers of commerce, the U.S. Census Bureau, large corporations, state educational agencies, and the military.

Improve the Data Collection Process for Anti-Asian Hate Incidents

Interviewees noted a crucial gap in data collection: the underreporting of hate incidents and crime that was disaggregated by AAPI subgroup, resulting in a lack of insight into the true extent of anti-Asian hate incidents. In addition, interviewees cited unanswered questions about the rate at which Asian students were choosing not to return to school during the COVID-19 pandemic, whether and how Asian students were being protected from bullying, and the extent to which Asian workers were choosing not to return to places of employment.

Interviewees also suggested data-collection methods they believed could help fill these data gaps. For improved insight into anti-Asian hate incidents, one interviewee suggested examining hospital records or police records in the context of how immigration experiences or status may have contributed to the experience of hate crime or incidents. To tackle the underreporting of hate incidents, other interviewees suggested exploring ways to encourage reporting, such as by paying attention to the experiences of individuals or families after reporting or by focusing on language barriers or cultural taboos around reporting.

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Several interviewees cited prior research on Asian American communities that included English-only surveys . . . which led to a biased sample of Asian American respondents and thus erroneous and misleading conclusions.

Conduct Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Data Collection

Interviewees highlighted the importance of language equity in data collection. Several interviewees cited prior research on Asian American communities that included English-only surveys (or only a small percentage of the Asian American surveys were conducted in Asian languages), which led to a biased sample of Asian American respondents and thus erroneous and misleading conclusions. For example, a leader from a community organization serving an Asian ethnic group said that the research on Asian Americans

> asked all the surveys in English. So, you're not actually reaching the population, the trenches. You are reaching a certain level of people who are comfortable in English. So, we again are a little more challenging than other types of research because you have to get the data in the native tongue.

Conduct Community-Partnered Data Collection

Several interviewees suggested that data-collection efforts should involve community partners to, for example, ensure cultural and linguistic appropriateness. Research organizations could provide expertise and that resources (including funding) to CBOs. A community organizer serving gender and sexual minority individuals spoke of a community needs assessment that their organization conducted on its own:

> I think we could have done [it] in three months [if we hire researchers/research organizations to do the survey], but we would have sacrificed the leadership development and the connection to our community along the way. The best things that research organizations can do is to provide advice, funding, and abundant time for community organizations to lead that work.

Assess How the K–12 Education System Covers the Asian American Experience

Interviewees also discussed much-needed research and data on how much AAPI history and culture are currently covered in the U.S. education system, which would be a starting point to advocate for formally including AAPI history in K–12 education. A leader from an organization preserving Asian American immigration history said,

> Across the U.S., what our education curriculums actually cover [and] how much Asian and Pacific Islander history is actually taught in schools . . . [is] definitely a very important data point for me. . . . It would be an important data point to be able to go to potential community organizations or potential supporters, our allies, or even funders to talk about. This is why it's important to talk about our histories in school. This is why it's important to continue to ensure that places like Angel Island, like the Japanese incarceration camps, and places in Detroit that commemorate what happened to Vincent

Chin, all these parts of our Asian Pacific Islander histories are more meaningfully included, both in the classroom and outside of the classroom.

Conduct Analysis of What Public Safety Means for Asian Americans

Several interviewees called for more research about what public safety means for AAPI individuals without making assumptions of the preferred solutions of a specific community. For example, a community organizer who works with young people of color said,

> How do you feel in the presence of police? What makes you feel the most unsafe in your neighborhood? What are some things immediately that will make you feel safer?

A community organizer from an organization serving transgender, nonbinary, and queer AAPIs observed:

> What actually makes people feel safe? I think that, so often in larger regional and national high-resource conversations, the solutions are assumed that the thing that makes people safe is policing or the thing that makes people safe is our strategies that our systems have tried for centuries and clearly are not succeeding up or at. I think just that question of like what actually makes you feel safe is something that actually people are rarely asked and given the opportunity to really answer.

Discussion

Our findings represent a collective voice of AAPI community stakeholders speaking about the impact of and possible solutions for this renewed manifestation of anti-Asian racism during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although we aimed to identify specific strategies and research items to combat COVID-19–related anti-Asian attacks, it is evident from our findings that these incidents occur in the context of historically entrenched and persistent anti-Asian racism at individual and systemic levels in the United States. Many of the recommendations are not new to those who are familiar with AAPI issues and research: For decades, scholars and advocates repeatedly have called for more-disaggregated data and greater education. Criticisms of the model minority narrative and other racial biases were first discussed in the 1970s,[22] and yet these stereotypes continue to underlie the current discussion about anti-Asian racism during the COVID-19 pandemic.[23] The fact that we continue to hear the same recommendations from community stakeholders and scholars in the context of a new crisis reflects the lack of action and progress and the invisibility of the group. Additionally, the similarity between the current crisis and historical waves of anti-Asian hate (e.g., Japanese internment camps during World War II, the murder of Vincent Chin during the U.S.-Japan automobile industry competition) highlights the importance of addressing the root causes of anti-Asian racism.

The findings on the triggers and community impact of the attacks during the pandemic are consistent with the research literature to date that reports elevated fear and anxiety.[24] Notably, the changes that the AAPI community described as positive (e.g., recent incidents galvanizing the

[I]t is evident from our findings that these incidents occur in the context of historically entrenched and persistent anti-Asian racism at individual and systemic levels in the United States.

community, younger generations becoming more active) described in our report represent a resilient response to this new manifestation of anti-Asian racism. Along with stakeholders' call to unify the community's voice and build multiracial alliances, these results provide qualitative support to a new model that theorizes the collective psychosocial resilience to COVID-19 anti-Asian racism.[25] Stakeholders' observations and views on community impact and mitigation strategies to combat anti-Asian hate during the COVID-19 pandemic have not been reported elsewhere. Their input is a valuable first step in planning and conducting next steps for community-engaged research to inform policy solutions. Based on our interviews, we determine that the strategies and research needed to combat anti-Asian hate include both specific strategies to address personally mediated racism (e.g., hate incidents) and a continued call to counter institutionalized or systemic racism. These different types of racism intertwine and intersect at both individual and societal levels; addressing anti-Asian hate incidents will not be possible without making systemic changes.

Next Steps Toward Research and Action

Drawing from our interviews with stakeholders from select AAPI community organizations at the national and local (focused on California) levels, we identified three domains for focusing policy action. Because of the exploratory nature and limited scope of this project, these observations and suggested next steps for a research agenda may not represent all viewpoints and aspects of Asian American communities, and not all recommendations are equally relevant or valued by every AAPI subgroup. Experiences and issues of AAPI communities outside

California may not be well represented. Given potential differences (e.g., community context, state policy) between AAPI individuals in California and those in other states, future research should assess whether the themes identified in this report are generalizable to the experiences of those residing elsewhere. The proposed next steps are based on recurring themes across our interviews. The research and action areas are generally consistent with a recent landscape study with AAPI organizations conducted by the Urban Institute.[26] That report focused primarily on civic engagement and civil rights organizations to derive recommendations for philanthropic leaders for the purpose of strategic investments.[27] In contrast, following CBPR principles, our report focuses on identifying next steps in a research agenda that key AAPI stakeholders (particularly those from grassroots CBOs) identify as critical to addressing anti-Asian racism and creating an initial step toward community-partnered action- and policy-oriented research.

Establish a More Accurate Picture of Asian American Identities

Establishing an accurate identity and image of various Asian American communities is critical to dismantling stereotypes (e.g., model minority, perpetual foreigner) and correcting misunderstandings and misconceptions about these communities. This can help the public understand and acknowledge the diversity within the Asian American community rather than viewing it as a monolith. There are challenges to achieving this task: For example, a lack of data regarding Asian Americans and NHPIs (e.g., grouping into an "other" category, citing the relatively small population size) makes it difficult to understand the community's needs; additional lack of disaggregated data

Establishing an accurate identity and image of various Asian American communities is critical to dismantling stereotypes.

often masks the within-group discrepancies and precludes understanding of specific challenges for the vulnerable groups; a lack of understanding from researchers and policymakers of language and other barriers to data collection can lead to misleading research results (e.g., conclusions that the community experiences no inequities); and harmful stereotypes, such as the model minority myth, hurt vulnerable AAPI subgroups at the same time as they make them invisible and neglected by the public, policymakers, and researchers.

One way to establish an accurate image of Asian Americans is through collecting more and better disaggregated data. Importantly, disaggregated data should be collected using culturally and linguistically appropriate instruments to ensure that all subgroups of the community are well represented. As noted, this recommendation has been advocated repeatedly over decades. Although efforts (e.g., AAPI Data) and progress have been made in some domains (e.g., education, health),[28] community stakeholders continue to share with us their frustration about the lack of progress and the fact that disaggregated data are necessary to fully understand where the vulnerabilities and needs exist for specific AAPI subgroups. Consistent with the CBPR approach, data-collection efforts should consistently engage community partners in long-term relationships that include joint research planning, data collection, interpretation, and dissemination to ensure that the research serves the community's needs and that data collection is culturally and linguistically appropriate. Research and data-collection efforts are required to understand the needs of vulnerable Asian Americans, NHPI, and subgroups (e.g., sexual and gender minority subgroups, those living in under-resourced neighborhoods) and to document and address persistent inequities and systemic racism against the AAPI community. Disaggregated data are needed not only to establish an accurate understanding of this community but also as a basis for equitable policymaking.

Another way to achieve a more accurate image of Asian Americans is through public education of their history and diversity. Research also should address how best to educate the public about AAPI history. This may include understanding what is currently being taught in the education systems. To increase the public's understanding of AAPIs as a group and help dismantle stereotypes, it would be essential to include AAPI history in K–12 education, because AAPI history is American history, and the AAPI community is an integral part of U.S. society. For example, amid the growing anti-Asian racist incidents during the pandemic, Illinois became the first state to have legislation that requires public schools to teach Asian American history.[29] For political leaders and decisionmakers, it is essential to define what would be the appropriate and sensitive language to use to discuss geopolitical issues about certain Asian countries (e.g., China) while avoiding stigmatizing Asians or Asian Americans residing in the United States.

Build Community Relationships with the Broader Society

The second policy area for more research and analysis is relationship building between the Asian American community and other areas of U.S. society. Given that Asian Americans constitute a small but fast-growing population, the group needs to continue to define its position in society and build relationships across different entities, including other racial and ethnic groups, and such institutions as the government and law enforcement. For the Asian American community, building relationships requires sensitivity about the challenges facing other racial and ethnic minorities, building a broader alliance in the equity movements, and learning to

Another way to achieve a more accurate image of Asian Americans is through public education of their history and diversity.

work with legal and political systems before a crisis occurs.

Considering the recent rise in the number of anti-Asian attacks, our interviewees described that certain Asian subgroups would welcome a hate crimes act, while other subgroups have serious concerns about such legislation because of either distrust of law enforcement or concerns about police brutality in other communities of color (e.g., greater police presence may not be welcomed in neighborhoods where AAPI individuals reside with other people of color). Additionally, although not specifically mentioned in the interviews, there is documented tension between Asian Americans and other communities of color.[30] Therefore, more research and analysis may be needed to examine how AAPI community members view public safety, how to build trust between AAPI communities and law enforcement, and, more generally, how the AAPI community should build solidarity, trust, and coalition with other racial and ethnic minority groups when scarcity of economic and political resources can potentially aggravate the conflicts. For example, our interviewees said that grassroots solutions, such as community patrol involving community members from other racial and ethnic groups in hotspots of anti-Asian incidents (e.g., Chinatown), may represent a step toward multiracial and multicultural unity.

Build Community Alliances and Capacity to Mitigate the Impact of Anti-Asian Racism

The third policy area concerns how to support the AAPI CBOs in building alliances across different AAPI subgroups and capacity to mitigate the impact of racism against the AAPI population. Our interviewees stated that anti-Asian racism manifests in both acute hate incidents and institutional injustice. Community organizations are on the frontlines to fight both, with advocacy ranging from legal rights action for AAPI individuals to providing direct assistance to victims of hate crimes or incidents. Many stakeholders commented that building alliances is critical because the

AAPI community is vastly diverse in culture, language, and religion. As a group, however, it is still relatively small, and organizations serving the AAPI community are often scattered, small in scale, and relatively recently established. In addition, the widespread model minority myth has not only led to underinvestment in public assistance and philanthropical funding of AAPI-serving organizations but also has reduced the willingness of AAPI subgroups to form alliances as a community.

Building alliances across AAPI community organizations will require financial resources (e.g., local government community grants, foundation grants), technical support, and staff training. Recent anti-Asian incidents add to the urgency to improve capacity- and alliance-building among community organizations that serve AAPI communities. Greater acknowledgment and more funding are needed, especially for community organizations that serve the most-marginalized and invisible ethnic groups within the AAPI community. Sustainable support for such organizations is needed to continue and expand services to marginalized and vulnerable AAPI subgroups (e.g., those living in underserved neighborhoods, lower socioeconomic status, sexual and gender minority groups).

Another way to build community capacity is through establishing community-research partnerships to conduct policy- and action-oriented research that is a high priority for the community following the CBPR model.[31] By establishing a committed, long-term, and equitable partnership between community organizations and research and academic institutions, CBPR can ensure that the research that is conducted is culturally congruent and serves the community's needs. The community's participation would span the research process, from the conception of the research topic to the dissemination of results. This co-learning process could help the AAPI community build capacity in various areas (e.g., addressing knowledge gaps, collecting data to understand community needs, obtaining funding, advocating for more resources) and could be an empowerment process itself.

Appendix A

This appendix contains a sample of the interview questions we posed to our interviewees. See Table 2 for the list of topics covered and the corresponding sample questions.

TABLE 2
Sample Interview Questions

Topics	Sample Questions
Organization service and target populations	• What are the missions/goals of the organization? • Who are the main target populations the organization serves? • How long has the organization served Asian Americans and/or the target population? • What are the main services/functions of the organization? • What is the motivation or impetus for the services/activities/programs offered? • What does success look like? What kinds of benchmarks or metrics are used?
Impact of anti-Asian racism/hate and mitigating strategies	• In your opinion, what causes anti-Asian racism? • What do you see as the impact of recent anti-Asian hate incidents and crime on Asian American communities that your organization serves? • Are you aware of any effective ways to counter anti-Asian hate and more broadly anti-Asian racism? • Has your organization set up anti-Asian racism programs or initiatives (in the past or in response to recent incidents)? • What strategies would you recommend for stopping or mitigating the negative impact of anti-Asian racism?
Data sources and information gaps	• What are the data sources you have used in the past or currently use in your routine projects? How can we advocate for more data for AAPI communities? • What are the gaps in information and data that would help your organization OR the Asian American communities your organization serves to address your specific concerns about anti-Asian racism?
Partners/collaborators	• What other organizations, government agencies or academic institutions have you or do you currently work with? • Who are the partner or sister organizations you usually work with?

Notes

[1] In this report, we use *Asian Americans* to refer to the populations presumably most directly affected by recent anti-Asian violence and discrimination during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic rather than the broader term *Asian American Pacific Islanders*. In this context, Asian Americans also include Asians residing in the United States, regardless of citizenship or immigrant status. Based on our interviews, we concluded that, given the purpose of this report, the term Asian American was more precise in most cases. In instances where we refer to issues relevant to the broader AAPI population, we use *AAPI*.

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About This Report

During the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, there has been a rise of anti-Asian attacks in the United States. These incidents occur in the context of historically entrenched and intersecting individual and systemic racism against Asians and Asian Americans. Although Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) are critical members of U.S. civil society and pillars of the country's economy and political life, little is known about their well-being because of a lack of data. There is also a gap in understanding the impact of anti-Asian sentiments during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this report, the authors interviewed key stakeholders from a diverse range of AAPI subgroups to understand community responses to the recent wave of anti-Asian hate during the COVID-19 pandemic and to identify mitigating strategies and information gaps to address anti-Asian racism.

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