



STOP AAPI HATE MENTAL HEALTH REPORT

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Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are experiencing unprecedented and growing health inequity issues brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and anti-AAPI hate [1].¹ While racism targeting Asian Americans is not new in U.S. history with exclusionary immigration policies that systemically barred immigration from Asia until 1965, the antagonistic U.S.-China relations and inflammatory political rhetoric about the virus (e.g., “China virus”) exacerbated racism against Asian Americans. This report features the findings from three research projects that investigated the effects of anti-Asian racism on mental health among Asian Americans during the pandemic: (1) Stop AAPI Hate Follow-Up Survey (Saw et al.), (2) National Anti-Asian American Racism Study (Liu et al.), and (3) COVID-19 Adult Resilience Experiences Study (Hahm et al.).

Overall Key Findings

- Asian Americans who have experienced racism are more stressed by anti-Asian hate than the pandemic itself (Saw et al.).
- One in five Asian Americans who have experienced racism display racial trauma, the psychological and emotional harm caused by racism (Saw et al.).
- After reporting, Asian Americans who have experienced racism have lower race-based traumatic stress (Saw et al.).
- Asian Americans who have experienced racism have heightened symptoms of depression, anxiety, stress, and physical symptoms (Liu et al.).
- Experience of racism during COVID-19 is found to be more strongly associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms (Hahm et al.).

¹ Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders (NHPI) health has been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic – from pre-existing health vulnerabilities [2] and experiences of race-based hate incidents during the pandemic [3]. While we honor the experiences of NHPI persons and communities, this report regrettably only focuses on Asian Americans’ experiences due to the small number of NHPI persons in the surveys.



Background

Asian American Mental Health Prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Prior to the pandemic, Asian Americans consistently displayed lower prevalence rates for serious psychological distress and lower rates of utilization of mental health treatment compared to other racial/ethnic groups [4-8].
- Asian Americans, particularly immigrants and those with lower English proficiency, often have trouble accessing mental health care due to structural, cultural, and linguistic barriers [9-10].
- The persistent damaging racial stereotypes of Asian Americans – such as the model minority stereotype – contribute to misconceptions about Asian Americans’ mental health status and mental health needs [11].

Background on Racism and Asian American Mental Health

- Racism is a system consisting of structures, practices and norms that affect individuals’ physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social health through multiple pathways [12-13].
- Racism can operate at multiple levels, and both structural and interpersonal racism negatively affects mental health [14-15].
- The negative impacts of racism on mental health can be temporary and/or long lasting. Racial trauma can be felt across generations (e.g., intergenerational effects of the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II) [16].
- Racism is an important factor in Asian Americans’ health. Racial discrimination experience is associated with both negative physical and mental health for Asian Americans [17].
- Racism – regardless of whether it is verbal or physical, blatant or ambiguous, direct or witnessed – can be understood as a chronic and acute stressor that elicits psychological, physiological, and behavioral responses within individuals [18].



(1) Stop AAPI Hate Follow-Up Survey

Anne Saw, Ph.D., Aggie J. Yellow Horse, Ph.D., Russell Jeung, Ph.D., Shreya Aragula, MA, Wendy de los Reyes, MEd, Michael Huynh, MPH, Eunbi Kwon, BA, Nancy Mai, BS, Jay Mantuhac, BA, Rebecca McGarity-Palmer, MA, Samantha Nau, MA, Fiona (Mengxue) Sun, BA

Description of Research

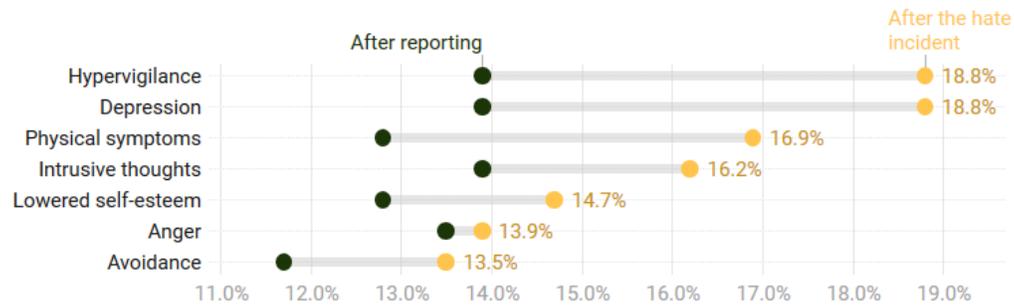
- The purpose of research was to examine the experiences and impacts of discrimination and the COVID-19 pandemic broadly on individuals who have experienced and reported hate incidents during the pandemic.
- In collaboration with the National AAPI COVID-19 Needs Assessment Study conducted by the Asian American Psychological Association (AAPA), researchers conducted a follow-up study with individuals who reported their anti-Asian hate incidents to Stop AAPI Hate as of November 2020 [19]. The Stop AAPI Hate follow-up survey was conducted in January-March 2021, and there were 413 individuals who participated. A parallel national needs assessment study was conducted by AAPA of 3,736 Asian Americans in January-April 2021 (the comparison group).

Key Findings from the Stop AAPI Hate (SAH) Follow Up Survey

- *Racial trauma* refers to the psychological or emotional harm caused by racism. Although it has some overlap with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), racial trauma is distinct from PTSD and not a psychological disorder, but rather can be understood as a normative response to racism. In response to racism, individuals can experience: depression, intrusive thoughts, anger, hypervigilance, somatic symptoms and physiological reactivity, decreased self-esteem, and avoidance or numbing [20]. Incidents of racism can lead to a loss of security and increased perception of the world as dangerous.
- One in five Asian Americans who have experienced racism display racial trauma (at least three significant racial trauma symptoms).
- After reporting to Stop AAPI Hate, Asian Americans reported a reduction in racial trauma symptoms, with nearly one-third (28%) who reported racial trauma after the hate incident no longer meeting criteria.

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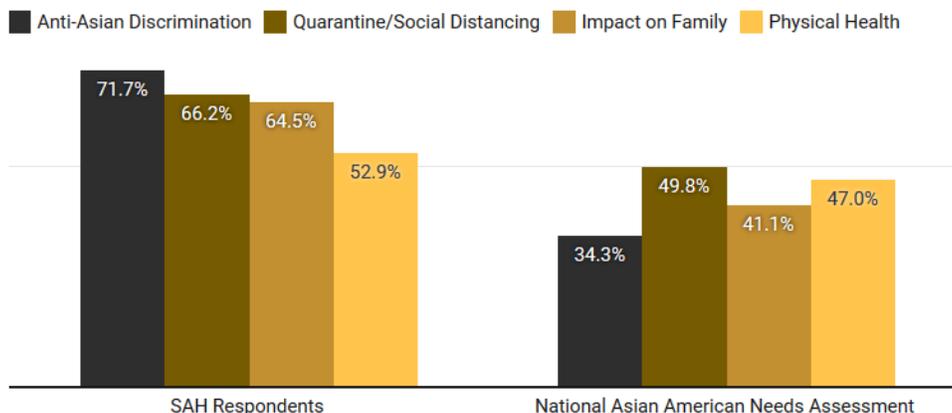
Hate Incident Related Race-Based Traumatic Stress



Key Findings from Comparing to National Needs Assessment Survey

- SAH follow-up study respondents (71.7%) report anti-Asian discrimination to be their greatest source of stress, much higher than other pandemic concerns, and much higher than respondents to the national survey (34.3%).
- About 95.3% of SAH follow-up study respondents report viewing the U.S. as more dangerous for Asian Americans compared to 75.2% of the national needs assessment survey (NNAS) respondents.
- More SAH follow-up study respondents (69.1%) report stress related to mental health concerns (compared to 52.0% of the NNAS respondents); and report depression or anxiety (48.7% compared to 40.7% for the NNAS respondents).

Greatest Sources of Stress





(2) National Anti-Asian American Racism Survey

Charles Liu, Ph.D., Tao Liu, Ph.D., Jeanie Chang, MA, Ashley Koh, BA, Lucinda Huang, BA, Ruth Shu Fu, MFT, Rachel Noh, Amelia Yang, BS

Description of Research

- The purpose of research was to assess the impacts of COVID-19-related Anti-Asian racism on mental health of Asian Americans in a *longitudinal* study.
- The research was conducted in June 2020, and included 565 Asian Americans.

Key Findings

- Six out of ten (62%) respondents indicated that they had directly experienced some form of active discrimination.
- Almost half of Asian Americans (46%) report anxiety during the pandemic, with 15% having depressive symptoms.
- Those who reported experiencing discrimination reported more depression (a 155% increase), anxiety (93%), stress (94%), and physical complaints (78%) than those who didn't.



(3) COVID-19 Adult Resilience Experiences Study (CARES)

Hyeouk “Chris” Hahm, Ph.D., Yoonsook Ha, Ph.D., Judith C. Scott, Ph.D., Venissala Wongchai, BA, Justin A. Chen, MD MPH, Cindy H. Liu, Ph.D.

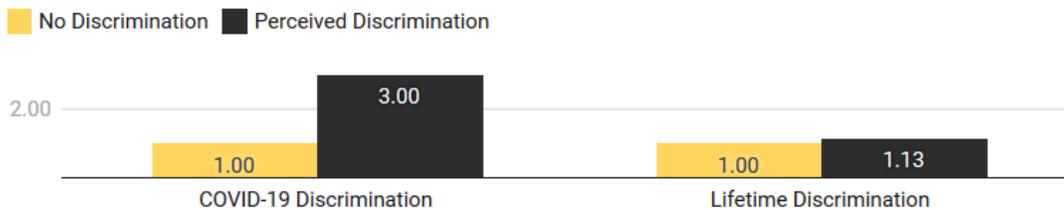
Description of Research

- The purpose of research was to examine the association between discrimination and mental health symptoms.
- Current data was drawn from Wave I of the COVID-19 Adult Resilience Experiences Study (CARES), which recruited 1,002 U.S.-living young adults aged 18-30 years from April 13 to June 11, 2020. The presented results include 211 study participants who self-identified as Asian or Asian American.

Key Findings

- About 68% of the Asian American study participants reported that they or their family members had experienced covert or overt discriminatory incidents during the initial months of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- *Prevalence*: During this pandemic, 1 in 3 Asian and Asian American young adults reported clinically elevated symptoms of depression and general anxiety, and 1 in 4 reported a PTSD diagnosis. These rates are higher than pre-COVID-19 mental health estimates.
- Asian Americans reporting COVID-related discrimination were three times more likely to also report symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) compared to those who did not report discrimination, even after accounting for pre-existing mental health diagnoses and lifetime report of discrimination.

Experiences of Discrimination and PTSD Symptoms



Note: Odds ratios are reported.

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Stop AAPI Hate Incident Reports regarding Mental Health

Verbal Harassment

- Someone drove up to me, rolled down their window, shouted "I used to beat up your kind of people when I was in high school!" And drove off laughing maniacally. I was terrified. I was alone, I was just going to pick up dinner, I was scared they were going to double back to physically attack me. I cried hysterically in my car after the incident. (Los Angeles, CA)
- I was walking with a female friend, and a man walked past us and said "Chinese go back to China." He then turned around and walked past us again and repeatedly yelled at us and said "Go back to China." We were very scared and tried to get away from him but he followed us for about three minutes, one block. Once we crossed the street to where more people were then he stopped following us. My friend and I were shaken by the incident. (Annadale, DC)

Avoidance/Shunning

- [My] 8th grade daughter [was] being teased & humiliated by schoolmates to run away from "Kung-flu / Coronavirus". Immediately [my] daughter felt ashamed to be Asian & scared to go back to school [after] this humiliation. (Concord, CA)

Coughed/Spat On

- Three boys circled my friend, spat on her, and called her slurs etc. She was about to burst into tears. She is scared to go to school now. (Amsterdam, NY)
- We have been terrorized by a racist offender who lives next door to us. We feel afraid for our safety, emotionally traumatized, elder abuse by yelling, shouting, videotaping, and spitting at our elderly mother when she is in her own backyard. We are on edge, constantly fear intrusion into our home, cannot sleep well at night, unable to walk outside due to fear for our safety. (Villa Park, CA)

Workplace Discrimination

- My new coworkers keep asking me whether or not I'm Chinese. After an initial high from being offered a job during the "China Virus", I am now feeling anxious and having trouble hiding my severe anxiety. This leaves me in a precarious position. If I fail my probation, who will hire me? (Gaithersburg, MD)



Implications

Asian Americans are experiencing unprecedented mental health issues brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and anti-Asian hate – including increased anxiety, depression, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms. These challenges place Asian Americans at greater risk for the development of long-term mental and physical health conditions. Trauma and fear of possible future experience of racism may prevent Asian Americans from accessing needed resources [21-22]. For example, in the SAH follow-up study, 25.4% of SAH follow-up study respondents reported access to health care (including mental health care) as a main source of stress compared to 14.2% of the national needs assessment survey respondents. Medically-underserved Asian Americans including but not limited to undocumented, low-income, elderly and limited-English proficient Asian Americans experience greater barriers to healthcare [21].

Coping and Healing

- The negative mental health impacts of anti-Asian racism should not be ignored or minimized. Heightened fear, perceived danger, and feelings of helplessness many Asian Americans feel as a result of increased anti-Asian hate, and which impact their mental health and social connections, are particularly troubling.
- At the same time, it is important to recognize and further promote Asian Americans' healing and resistance practices, such as reporting and seeking social and community support.
- For example, about 28% of Asian Americans who reported racial trauma after the hate incident no longer met criteria for race-based trauma after reporting to Stop AAPI Hate. This suggests that reporting is one important strategy for Asian Americans to cope with hate incidents (Saw et al.).
- Research found that sharing stories about one's own racial discrimination experience buffered the mental burden of racial discrimination [23].



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[Stop AAPI Hate](#) is a national coalition addressing anti-Asian racism across the U.S. The coalition was founded by the Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council (A3PCON), Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA), and San Francisco State University's Asian American Studies Department. Between March 19, 2020 and March 31, 2021, Stop AAPI Hate has received 6,603 reported incidents of racism and discrimination targeting Asian Americans across the U.S. Visit stopaapihate.org.



The [Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council](#) (A3PCON) is a coalition of more than forty community-based organizations that serve and represent the 1.5 million Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the greater Los Angeles area, with a particular focus on low-income, immigrant, refugee and other vulnerable populations.



[Chinese for Affirmative Action](#) (CAA) was founded in 1969 to protect the civil and political rights of Chinese Americans and to advance multiracial democracy in the United States. Today, CAA is a progressive voice in and on behalf of the broader Asian American and Pacific Islander community. We advocate for systemic change that protects immigrant rights, promotes language diversity, and remedies racial and social injustice.



[SF State Asian American Studies](#) (AAS) is the oldest and largest such academic program in the nation. Founded after the 1968-69 Black Student Union and Third World Liberation Front student strike, it maintains the strike's values of student activism, social justice, and community self-determination.