

# Addressing Inequities in Education: Considerations for Asian American Children and Youth in the Era of COVID- 19

Edited by Tiffany Yip, Ph.D., *Fordham University*. For more information, contact Kelly R. Fisher, Ph.D., Director for Policy, or Nighisti Dawit, M.Sc., Senior Policy Associate, *Society for Research in Child Development*, at [policy@srcd.org](mailto:policy@srcd.org).

Published

Wednesday, September 9, 2020

8:00am

---

Statement of the Evidence

[Download the Brief](#)

PDF 96.32 KB

[Read more briefs like this one](#)

---

**STATEMENTS OF THE  
EVIDENCE**

---

**MATERIALS**

## Authors

- **Tomoko Wakabayashi, Ed.D.**, Oakland University
- **Charissa S. L. Cheah, Ph.D.**, University of Maryland, Baltimore County
- **Tzu-Fen Chang, Ph.D.**, California State University, Bakersfield
- **Gabrielle Lai, M.A.** National Institute of Education, Singapore
- **Kaveri Subrahmanyam, Ph.D.**, California State University, Los Angeles
- **Nandita Chaudhary, Ph.D.**
- **Sunah Hyun, Ph.D.**, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Harvard Medical School
- **Puja Patel, M.Sc.**, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a global surge in harassment and hate crimes against individuals of Asian descent, including Asian Americans.<sup>1</sup> Misdirected blame and fear of COVID-19 is xenophobic, and simulates historical and systemic racism that frames Asian Americans as “perpetual foreigners.” Racial discrimination negatively impacts academic well-being and mental health; yet Anti-Asian sentiments and microaggressions are often overlooked due to the model minority myth (MMM). Asian Americans are a highly diverse group; the MMM can mask significant differences in students’ risks and needs. As schools prepare to reopen, policymakers and school administrators should craft their messages to avoid furthering anti-Asian sentiments that filter down to schools and communities. Misinformation is shared virtually across communities regardless of their Asian American composition. School/community leaders must proactively address COVID-19-related social stigma and discrimination, take steps to ensure Asian American children’s psychological and physical safety, and address social-emotional and academic needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic was first documented in Wuhan, China in late 2019. As the virus quickly spread, people of Asian descent, regardless of their ties to China, became targets of global blame.<sup>2</sup> In the United States, both in-person and online forms of xenophobia increased as anti-Chinese social media posts, media coverage, policies, and comments from public leaders exacerbated violence against Asian Americans,<sup>3</sup> and Islamophobic conspiracy-theories. Blaming the COVID-19 pandemic on Asian Americans<sup>4</sup> simulates historical racism in the United States. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Japanese internment during World War II, and post-9/11 discrimination against South Asians<sup>5</sup> have framed Asian Americans as “perpetual foreigners.”

STOP AAPI HATE has received over 1,800 anti-Asian incident reports related to COVID-19.<sup>6</sup> Over 60% of Asian Americans witnessed someone blaming Asian people,<sup>7</sup> and over 80% of 10- to 18-year-old Chinese Americans experienced or witnessed COVID-19-related discrimination in person or online.<sup>8</sup> Increasing Islamophobia has also been reported.<sup>9</sup> Asian American students are vulnerable to increased psychological distress, lower academic achievement, and lower engagement when exposed to racial discrimination.<sup>8,10</sup> Just hearing about or witnessing hate incidents, including through social media, can exacerbate distress<sup>8,11</sup> leading to poor academic performance and truancy.<sup>12</sup>

Another problematic image of Asian Americans is that of “model minorities,” which emerged in the 1960s as a way to dismiss the existence of systemic racism<sup>13</sup> by portraying Asian Americans as academically and economically successful. However, Asian Americans have highly diverse heritages, religions, and immigration and socio-economic backgrounds. Their double status as “perpetual foreigners” and “model minorities” creates conflicts in identity and belonging, and divisions across races.<sup>14</sup>

Over 60% of Asian Americans witnessed someone blaming Asian people, and over 80% of 10- to 18-year-old Chinese Americans experienced or witnessed COVID-19-related discrimination in person or online.

### **The Model Minority Myth Masks Challenges with At-Home Learning**

The model minority myth (MMM) masks disparities among Asian Americans.<sup>15</sup> Asian Americans have the highest median income, but also the largest income gap.<sup>16</sup> Asian Americans exceed their share of the population in 72% of high-contact essential medical-related occupations and personal-appearance workers (e.g., cosmetologists) during COVID-19,<sup>17</sup> creating challenges to meeting childcare and at-home learning needs. Partially due to the surge in Asian immigration after race-based quotas were lifted in 1965, over 59%

of Asian Americans are foreign-born<sup>18</sup> and may face immigration-related challenges (e.g., low wages, food insecurity, hazardous working conditions). Low-income families may have difficulty accessing technologies such as the internet<sup>19</sup> and computers,<sup>20</sup> which are needed for at-home learning.

Asian Americans are the least likely racial/ethnic group to report speaking English at home or speaking it well.<sup>21</sup> Asian American children whose parents have limited English skills may struggle with at-home learning.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, Asian Americans are unlikely to seek or receive academic help due to the MMM.<sup>23</sup>

### **Asian Americans Face Barriers to Seeking Mental Health Support**

More than 5,000 Asian Americans have lost their lives,<sup>24</sup> and among all racial groups, Asian Americans experienced the largest percentage increase (450%) in unemployment rates from February to June 2020.<sup>17</sup> The anti-Asian stigma on top of these losses and disruptions to peer relationships, family routines, and kinship support caused by shelter-in-place regulations can exacerbate mental health problems including PTSD, depression, and anxiety.<sup>25</sup>

Whether direct or vicarious, in person or online, racial discrimination and perceptions of Sinophobia due to COVID-19 were associated with poorer psychological wellbeing and increased internalizing problems, anxiety, and externalizing problems in Chinese American families.<sup>8</sup> Over 65% of Chinese American children/adolescents and over 78% of parents reported being worried that they will suffer because of China being blamed for COVID-19.<sup>8</sup> Race-based prejudices can be acquired in schools,<sup>26</sup> and such racial discrimination and harassment can negatively impact mental health.<sup>27</sup> Asian Americans, however, are less likely than non-Hispanic White Americans to seek help<sup>28</sup> due in part to perceived stigma, language barriers, and lack of ethnic match with mental health providers.<sup>29</sup>

### **Policy and Practice Implications**

Policymakers should craft their messages to avoid further anti-Asian sentiments that filter down to schools and communities. Schools and community leaders must proactively address COVID-19-related social stigma and discrimination against Asian American children<sup>30</sup> by:

- Providing scientifically-validated information on COVID-19-spread and implementing policies to correct misinformation among school personnel and students, including the misconception that Asian Americans are carriers of, and should be blamed for, COVID-19.
- Mandating that teachers/staff take diversity, equity, and inclusion training, including bias reduction

and bystander training that addresses issues specific to Asian Americans, since anti-Asian sentiments and microaggressions are often overlooked due to the MMM.<sup>15</sup>

- Including accurate coverage of Asian American history in school curriculum.
- Updating anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies to include clear reporting guidelines and constructive follow-through, such as restorative justice.<sup>31</sup>
- Engaging families and community members prior to reopening schools and strengthening school-community efforts to identify and prevent anti-Asian sentiments from spreading in person and online.
- Ensuring that teachers/staff proactively assess Asian American students' and families' technology access and support, English language support, and socio-emotional needs via regular online or phone check-ins, as they may be reluctant to seek help.
- Disseminating COVID-19-related information and resources in the languages spoken across their communities, ensuring that interpretations and/or translations of school-home communications and English language support and tutoring are readily available.
- Connecting teachers/staff and families with school-based mental health programs and community healthcare providers to facilitate culturally-relevant, integrated mental and behavioral health services that provide resources to normalize help-seeking behaviors and support Asian American children's mental health.<sup>32</sup>

This brief is part of [a larger volume](#) that addresses the impact of systemic racism and the potential exacerbating effects of COVID-19 on racial-ethnic minority children, youth, and families, and LGBTQ+ youth. The full volume includes the following briefs:

- [Considerations for American Indian and Alaska Native Children and Youth in the Era of COVID-19](#)
- [Considerations for Asian American Children and Youth in the Era of COVID-19](#)
- [Considerations for Black Children and Youth in the Era of COVID-19](#)
- [Considerations for Latinx Children and Youth in the Era of COVID-19](#)
- [Considerations for LGBTQ+ Children and Youth in the Era of COVID-19](#)

## Endnotes / References

(1) In this brief, we use “Asian American” to refer to individuals of Asian descent living in the United States.

- (2) World Health Organization. (2020, April 21). *Addressing human rights as key to the COVID-19 response*. <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/addressing-human-rights-as-key-to-the-covid-19-response>
- (3) Schild, L., Ling, C., Blackburn, J., Stringhini, G., Zhang, Y. and Zannettou, S. (2020, April 8). “Go eat a bat, Chang!”: An early look on the emergence of sinophobic behavior on web communities in the face of COVID-19. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2004.04046>
- (4) U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. (2020, March 20). *The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights expresses concern over growing anti-Asian racism and xenophobia amid the COVID-19 outbreak*. <https://www.usccr.gov/press/2020/03-20-Racism-and-Coronavirus-Stmt.pdf>
- (4) U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. (2020, May 8). *The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights unanimously issues recommendations to secure nondiscrimination in the COVID-19 pandemic context, and specifically to address anti-Asian racism and xenophobia*. <https://www.usccr.gov/press/2020/05-08-Anti-Asian-Discrimination.pdf>
- (5) U.S. Department of Justice. (n.d.). *Combating Post-9/11 Discriminatory Backlash*. Retrieved May 31, 2020, from <https://www.justice.gov/crt/combating-post-911-discriminatory-backlash-6>
- (6) Borja, M., Jeung, R., Horse, A. Y., Gibson, J., Gowing, S., Lin, N., Navins, A., & Power, E. (2020, June 17). *Anti-Chinese rhetoric tied to racism against Asian Americans Stop AAPI Hate Report*. Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council. [http://www.asianpacificpolicyandplanningcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/Anti-China\\_Rhetoric\\_Report\\_6\\_17\\_20.pdf](http://www.asianpacificpolicyandplanningcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/Anti-China_Rhetoric_Report_6_17_20.pdf)
- (7) Ellerbeck, A. (2020, April 28). *Over 30 percent of Americans have witnessed COVID-19 bias against Asians, poll says*. NBC News. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/over-30-americans-have-witnessed-covid-19-bias-against-asians-n1193901>
- (8) Cheah, C. S. L., Wang, C., Ren, H., Zong, X., Cho, H. S., & Xue, X. (2020). COVID-19 racism and mental health in Chinese American Families. *Pediatrics*. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2020-021816>

- (9) Kayaoglu, T. (2020, June 17). *Pandemic politics: A public health crisis and a hate crisis: COVID-19 and Islamophobia*. Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/pandemic-politics-a-public-health-crisis-and-a-hate-crisis-covid-19-and-islamophobia/>
- (10) Benner, A. D., Wang, Y., Shen, Y., Boyle, A. E., Polk, R., & Cheng, Y. P. (2018). Racial/ethnic discrimination and well-being during adolescence: A meta-analytic review. *American Psychologist*, 73(7), 855–883. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000204>
- (11) Huynh, V. W., Huynh, Q.-L., & Stein M.-P. (2017). Not just sticks and stones: Indirect ethnic discrimination leads to greater physiological reactivity. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 23(3), 425-434. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000138>
- (12) Yang, K.-E., & Ham, S.-H. (2017). Truancy as systemic discrimination: Anti-discrimination legislation and its effect on school attendance among immigrant children. *The Social Science Journal*, 54(2), 216-226. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2017.02.001>
- (13) Chou, R. S., & Feagin, J. R. (2015). *Myth of the model minority: Asian Americans facing racism* (2nd ed.). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315636313>
- (14) Tewari, N., & Alvarez, A. N. (Eds.). (2009). *Asian American psychology: Current perspectives*. Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203809839>
- (15) Shih, K. Y., Chang, T.-F., & Chen, S.-Y. (2019). Impacts of the model minority myth on Asian American individuals and families: Social justice and critical race feminist perspectives. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 11(3), 412-428. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12342>
- (16) Kochhar, R., & Cilluffo, A. (2018, July 12). *Income inequality in the U.S. is rising most rapidly among Asians*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2018/07/12/income-inequality-in-the-u-s-is-rising-most-rapidly-among-asians/>

- (17) Dang, E., Huang, S., Kwok, A., Lung, H., Park, M., & Yueh, E. (2020, August 6). *COVID-19 and advancing Asian Americans*. McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-advancing-asian-american-recovery>
- (18) López, G., Ruiz, N. G., & Patten, E. (2017, September 8). *Key facts about Asian Americans, a diverse and growing population*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/08/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>
- (19) Van Lancker, W., & Parolin, Z. (2020). COVID-19, school closures, and child poverty: A social crisis in the making. *The Lancet Public Health*, 5(5), e243-e244. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(20\)30084-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(20)30084-0)
- (20) Zhang, H., Washington, R., & Yin, J. (2014). Improving strategies for low-income family children's information literacy. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 2(9), 655-658. <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2014.020908>
- (21) Budiman, A. (2020, May 7). *Asian Americans are fastest-growing racial or ethnic group in the U.S. electorate*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/05/07/asian-americans-are-the-fastest-growing-racial-or-ethnic-group-in-the-u-s-electorate/>
- (22) Duong, M. T., Badaly, D., Liu, F. F., Schwartz, D., & McCarty, C. A. (2016). Generational differences in academic achievement among immigrant youths: A meta-analytic review. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(1), 3-41. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315577680>
- (23) Hong, J. S. (2010). Understanding Vietnamese youth gangs in America: An ecological systems analysis. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 15(4), 253-260. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2010.01.003>
- (23) Kim, P. Y., & Lee, D. (2014). Internalized model minority myth, Asian values, and help-seeking attitudes among Asian American students. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 20(1), 98-106. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033351>



- (24) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020a). *Provisional death counts for Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): Weekly updates by select demographic and geographic characteristics*.  
[https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid\\_weekly/index.htm#Race\\_Hispanic](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid_weekly/index.htm#Race_Hispanic)
- (25) Dyregrov, A., Salloum, A., Kristensen, P., & Dyregrov, K. (2015). Grief and traumatic grief in children in the context of mass trauma. *Current psychiatry reports*, 17(6), 48. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-015-0577-x>
- (26) Donovan, B. M. (2016). Learned inequality: Racial labels in the biology curriculum can affect the development of racial prejudice. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 54(3), 379–411.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/tea.21370>
- (27) Lee, D. L., & Ahn, S. (2011). Racial discrimination and Asian mental health: A meta-analysis. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 39(3), 463-489. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000010381791>
- (28) Okamura, K. H., Ebesutani, C., Bloom, R., Higa-McMillan, C. K., Nakamura, B. J., & Chorpita, B. F. (2016). Differences in internalizing symptoms across specific ethnic minority groups: An analysis across Chinese American, Filipino American, Japanese American, Native Hawaiian, and White youth. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 25(11), 3353–3366. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-016-0488-4>
- (29) Spencer, M. S., Chen, J., Gee, G. C., Fabian, C. G., Takeuchi, D. T. (2010). Discrimination and mental health-related service use in a national study of Asian Americans. *American Journal of Public Health*, 100(12), 2410-2417. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2009.176321>
- (30) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020b). *Operating schools during COVID-19: CDC's Considerations*. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools.html>
- (31) Zehr, H., & Gohar, A. (2003). *The little book of restorative justice*. Good Books.  
<https://www.unicef.org/tdad/littlebookrjpakaf.pdf>

(32) Sanchez, A. L., Cornacchio, D., Poznanski, B., Golik, A. M., Chou, T., & Comer, J. S. (2017). The effectiveness of school-based mental health services for elementary-aged children: A meta-analysis. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 57(3), 153–165.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2017.11.022>