

Responding to anti-Asian racism requires better info about the AAPI community and its needs

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The recent rise of anti-Asian attacks across the U.S. has galvanized the community to build newfound alliances and resilience, with advocates working to increase reporting of hate incidents and developing strategies

to fight anti-Asian racism, according to a new RAND Corporation report.

Surveying stakeholders who serve Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities, researchers found that participants believed that general public anxiety and fear during the COVID-19 pandemic—along with negative rhetoric about AAPI people by prominent politicians and public officials—triggered the current wave of anti-Asian hate.

While discussing the need for services to AAPI communities to combat the current dual threats of COVID-19 and anti-Asian hate, almost all community stakeholders brought up long-term persistent racial equity problems and the lack of services for AAPI people.

The interviews suggested that to reduce racial inequities and better target services needed by AAPI communities, priority should be given to collecting race, ethnicity and language- specific information about health and [economic indicators](#) through partnerships with community organizations.

"Compared to other racial and ethnic groups, there is much less information available about the racial inequities that affect the AAPI population," said Lu Dong, the study's lead author and an associate behavioral scientist at RAND, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization.

"Our analysis represents a step toward addressing this knowledge gap in hopes of spurring further discussions about potential solutions to this new wave of anti-Asian racism," she said. "Now is the time to increase investment in research needed to inform policy and action during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic."

Asian Americans are the fastest growing racial group in the United

States, with the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander population also showing a high rate of growth.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the AAPI population has faced a new wave of anti-Asian racism and hate incidents. These incidents include a mass shooting in Atlanta in March 2021, physical attacks on AAPI youth on school grounds and discrimination against businesses owned by AAPI people.

RAND researchers conducted a preliminary study to explore the spike in hate incidents against AAPI people, performing semi-structured interviews with 20 members of national and local organizations in California that serve AAPI communities. The project focused on California because it has the largest Asian American population in the nation (roughly 6.7 million in 2019) and the largest Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander population outside of the state of Hawaii.

Study participants described the recent anti-Asian attacks as occurring in the context of longstanding systematic racism and inequities faced by the AAPI community.

For example, there has been disregard about the diversity among different AAPI communities, expectations for AAPI people to be the "model minority" (self-reliant without complaining), and a suspicion of the intention, loyalty and trustworthiness of AAPI people no matter how long or across how many generations they and their families have lived in the U.S.

Based on the interviews with stakeholders, researchers identified three areas for more research and action that may inform future policy solutions.

The first is exploring ways to establish a more accurate image for Asian

Americans and dismantle stereotypes. Such efforts are important to help the public better understand the diversity within the AAPI community, rather than viewing this community as a monolith.

Another area for action is building AAPI communities' relationships with other sectors of U.S. society, such as other racial/[ethnic groups](#) and government agencies. This would allow the AAPI community to build broader alliances, and to work more collaboratively with legal and political systems before a crisis occurs.

Finally, researchers say it is important to support capacity-building in [community organizations](#) serving the AAPI population, an action that would better serve this diverse racial group and counter anti-AAPI racism at both individual and systemic levels.

Other authors of the report are Jennifer Bouey, Douglas Yeung, Peggy Chen and Priya Gandhi.

More information: Addressing Anti-Asian Racism in the Era of COVID-19: Next Steps for a Research Agenda by Lu Dong et al is available at www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1594-1.html

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