

connect!

A newsletter for Asian American parents & children

SPRING 2021

Promoting Resilience in AAPI Families during COVID-19 Pandemic

YERAM CHEONG

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities for children, youth, and families from the historically marginalized communities in the United States. For Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities, the anti-Asian rhetoric for blaming the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the racial violence and discrimination against Asian American individuals, families, and communities. According to the national report of the STOP AAPI Hate (2021), about 6,603 of anti-Asian hate incidents were reported between March 19, 2020 to March 16, 2021. The most common types of discrimination involved verbal harassment (e.g., name calling, being yelled at; about 65% of the reports) and shunning (deliberate avoidance of the AAPI individual based on race; about 18% of the reports). Other forms of discrimination also included physical assault (13%), as well as potential civil rights violations (e.g., workplace discrimination, being barred from public transportation; about 10%), and online harassment (about 7%).

Experiences of racial discrimination had a significant impact on the wellbeing of Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only did Asian American individuals experience an elevated level of racial discrimination, these experiences were also associated with reports of poorer physical (Lee & Waters, 2020) and mental health (e.g., poor quality of sleep, depression, anxiety; Cheah, Wang et al., 2020; Lee & Waters, 2020). A recent study conducted by Dr. Cixin Wang and her colleagues found that, for those who did not experience direct discrimination personally, many also described exposures to stories and images of discrimination, including media perpetuating xenophobia (Cheah, Wang et al., 2020). Such vicarious discrimination, in which an individual is affected by witnessing, reading, or hearing about experiences of discrimination directed at same-race others, and the perception of xenophobia has also suggested to be associated with poorer mental health, especially among teen-aged youth (Cheah, Wang et al., 2020).

In this Issue

- **Yellow Peril and Model Minority Stereotypes**
- **Cascading Effects of COVID-related Stress on Family Functioning**
- **Tips for Parents**
- **Resources**



Photo by Jason Leung

Yellow Peril and Model Minority Stereotypes

The fear and anxiety in out-casting Asian Americans are not new and are reflected in American history. *Yellow Peril* was an influential political illustration in the 1890s that portrayed Asian Americans as “perpetual foreigners” and economic competitors that threatened the U.S. economy and the White race (Kawai, 2005). Anti-Asian sentiment has also prevailed in U.S. legislations and history, such as the *1882 Chinese Exclusion Act*, *1892 Geary Act*, *1907-1908 Gentleman’s Agreement*, *1917 and 1924 Immigration Act*, as well as the detention of Japanese Americans in concentration camps during World War II. On the other hand, the model minority stereotype was constructed in the 1960s as mainstream media praised Chinese and Japanese Americans as a law-abiding, hard working model minority group (Suzuki, 2002; Wu & Kim, 2014). The model minority stereotype or myth refers to the pervasive idea that Asian Americans are highly educated and financially well off, picturing the image of problem-free immigrant success, in which Asians’ hard work, determination, and perseverance have enabled them to bootstrap their way out of hardship (Lee, 1996). This model minority myth had historically positioned Asian Americans against other marginalized groups and especially served as a tool of anti-Blackness in the 1960s when the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements were unfolding (Kiang et al., 2016; Suzuki, 2002).

Seemingly a positive stereotype, the model minority perpetuates a colorblind ideology that is harmful because the “successful” image of Asian Americans is used to undermine the presence of systemic racism at work (Kawai, 2005). Wielding Asian Americans as both a “model minority” against other people of color and the “perpetual foreigner” has positioned Asian Americans in ambivalence for critical racial discourses. The model minority stereotype also overlooks the hardship and negatives experiences that some Asian Americans must cope with, including a wide income gap in the country and significant disparities in mental health (Budiman et al., 2019; Clough et al., 2013; Ngo & Lee, 2007). Moreover, the outbreak of a novel coronavirus and anti-Asian rhetoric perpetuated by the former President’s use of the term, “Kung Flu” or “Chinese virus” has quickly shifted Asian Americans from being a model minority to a “yellow peril” that poses threat to the public health in the U.S. society (NBCnews).

“*Seemingly a positive stereotype, the model minority perpetuates a colorblind ideology that is harmful because the “successful” image of Asian Americans is used to undermine the presence of systemic racism at work.*”

Cascading Effects of COVID-related Stress on Family Functioning

The COVID-19 pandemic has also redefined family life during the stay-at-home order and school closures. Parents may face challenges with multiple demands (e.g., work-home balance, caregiving duties, home schooling) and psychological stresses that comes with an economic burden (e.g., job loss) or increased parenting burden (Brown et al., 2020; Prime et al., 2020). Children can also face challenges with emotional distresses that come with altered daily activities or adjustment to distance learning (Rothstein et al., 2020). School closures and physical distancing also limited access to sources of social support for children and youth for their mental health (Masonbrink & Hurley, 2020). Promoting healthy family functioning during these challenging times is especially important, given its direct and indirect impacts to youth’s development and wellbeing. A cascading effect of COVID-related stresses on family systems can be detrimental to both parents’ and children’s wellbeing. The environmental factors, such as the hostile sociopolitical climate and pandemic-related stress, can trickle down to affect parents’ mental health and their interpersonal relationship qualities (Brown et al., 2020; Hess et al., 2020), which can impact their child’s wellbeing and academic engagement (Dahlen, 2016; Havewala et al., 2019).

of the COVID-19 pandemic suggested that children were integrating COVID-19 into their everyday thinking by forming emotional representations of the pandemic as an “enemy” (i.e., virus), the “heroes” (i.e., healthcare professionals), and variety of emotional responses about the lockdown and safety (Idoia et al., 2020). Children’s emotional and psychological distresses were impacting their health and ability to concentrate or regulate their emotions (Jiao et al., 2020) as well as the quality of parent-child interactions during the pandemic (Schmidt et al., 2020). An ongoing study in Dr. Cixin Wang’s lab examines how various stressors can ripple down to family units by impacting the quality of parent-child interactions, such as parents employing more harsh parenting practices. These studies suggest that children are not impervious to the impact of COVID-19-related stress. Moreover, for Asian American families, the heightened rates of COVID-19-related discrimination resulted in worsening of the mothers’ mental health, which in turn, affected their youth’s physical and psychological health (e.g., sleep disturbances, anxiety, depressive symptoms, etc.; Cheah, Wang et al., 2020). Therefore, understanding processes and practices that can promote resilience (the adaptive process to bounce back from experiences of adversity) is important to facilitate healthy family functioning and the child’s wellbeing.

A study that was released in the beginning phase

“*Promoting healthy family functioning during these challenging times is especially important, given its direct and indirect impacts to youth’s development and wellbeing.*”

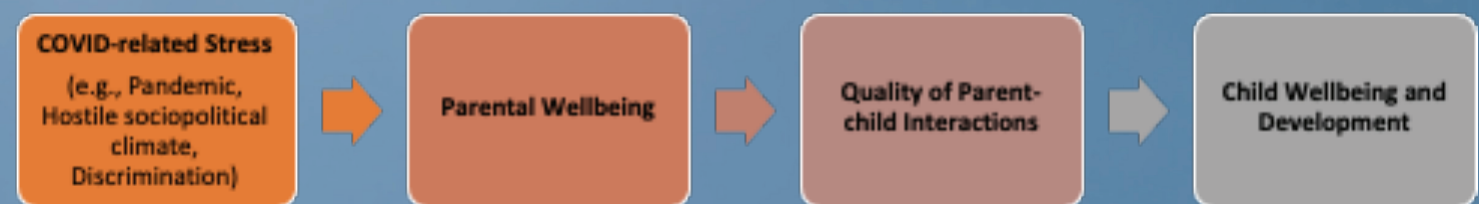


Figure 1. Cascading effect of covid-related stress on family systems and child development



Tips for Parents

1 Look after your own mental wellbeing.

A parent's mental health is a source of resilience for the child's mental health. Seeking social supports and professional help are important as it can protect from the negative impact of stressful life events, such as the ethnic-racial discrimination during COVID-19 (Lee & Waters, 2020). Some examples of self-care activities can include physical exercises, mediation, journaling, and connecting with close friends and families.

2 Encourage children to speak openly about their feelings and thoughts (Dalton et al., 2020), validate their feelings, and initiate conversations about race, discrimination, and racism.

A recent study in China showed that having open communication between parents and children of ages 6-18 about the ongoing pandemic mitigated depression, anxiety, and stress, and promoted life satisfaction (Tang et al., 2020). Emotion-focused conversations create a space for children to share their own feelings without leaving them to cope with the difficult feelings alone (Dalton et al., 2020). Validating children's fears and concerns about current experiences of anti-Asian racism can also help destigmatize the need for help (<http://division45.org/covid-19/>). Though these processes parents can model effective coping strategies for their children (Litam & Oh, 2020). Studies have also shown the importance of talking about race, racism, and discrimination. Communication with children can increase children's ethnic-racial identity, self-esteem, academic outcomes, and family cohesion. Parents who employed positive ethnic-racial socialization strategies have shown to facilitate stronger cross-racial friendship and social skills in children (Hamm, 2001).

Using books, news, TV to talk about the issues can help asking children what they are thinking and how they are processing the events. Some ideas for initiating conversation around race and racism can include: "Do you feel safe in class? What will help make you feel safe?" "Have you ever experienced anyone calling you a name or a slur?" "Have you felt angry about how Asians are treated and did not know what do with it?" and "Do you worry about being treated differently because you are Asian/[ethnicity]?"

3 Engage youth in collaborative activities.

For adolescents, including them in decision-making can foster a sense of agency. (Singh et al., 2020). Empower youth through engaging in collective and civic actions towards equity and social justice.

4 Check your own stigma and biases and strengthen ethnic-racial identity by raising "critical consciousness."

Critical consciousness represents oppressed or marginalized people's critical analysis of their social conditions and individual or collective action taken to change perceived inequities (Freire, 1973; Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011). Learn about Asian American history to understand racism within the context of broader systemic issues that perpetuate inequity and violence. The struggles of Asian community and other marginalized groups are intertwined in many ways. Asian American and Black communities also have a long history of solidarity in civil rights movements. Reflecting on beliefs, stigma, and biases that may have been internalized about anti-Blackness (e.g., dislike of darker skin, stereotypes about Black men being a threat) is an important step. Understanding other group's experiences of systemic racism and oppression also provides languages and historical knowledge to make sense of current anti-Asian violence. Asian immigrant and Asian American youth have been active and expressing the desire to have more dialogues with their family members in combatting anti-Blackness and promote cross-racial solidarity beyond their own ethnic-racial boundary.

Collaborating with schools and encouraging the implementation of Ethnic Studies for school curriculum is one example of anti-racism efforts for combatting the current hostile sociopolitical climate.



Photo by Lerone Pieters

Resources

A list of resources is available on the Asian American Studies Program website, including:

- Reporting incidents of hate, harassment, violence, and discrimination
- Resources for talking to your children about racism and discrimination
- Recommended children's books
- Helpful videos and training
- Other resources

Visit go.umd.edu/sp21connect to access the resources.

Research



Students from Dr. Terry K. Park's AAST200 class (Introduction to Asian American Studies) in Spring 2020 put together a website tool to provide resources to deepen community's understanding about the historical roots and rises of anti-Asian racism. The website also serves as a space for the University of Maryland community to reflect on the impact of current anti-Asian racism amidst COVID-19 pandemic and to provide resources. The full website can be found here: <https://blog.umd.edu/aast200spring20/>

Dr. Terry K. Park is a lecturer in the Asian American Studies Program. His research focuses on how the Korean War shaped and continues to shape the U.S. liberal empire and transpacific cultural practices. Dr. Park engages in community-based teaching and instructs several AAST courses.

References

- Brown, N., Te Riele, K., Shelley, B., & Woodroffe, J. (2020). Learning at home during COVID-19: Effects on vulnerable young Australians. Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment. Retrieved from: <http://www.wscf.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Learning-at-home-during-COVID-19-Effects-on-vulnerable-young-Australians.pdf>
- Budiman, A., Cilluffo, A., & Ruiz, N. G. (2019, May). Key facts about Asian origin groups in the U.S. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/22/key-facts-about-asian-origin-groups-in-the-u-s/>
- Cheah, C. S., Wang, C., Ren, H., Zong, X., Cho, H. S., & Xue, X. (2020). COVID-19 racism and mental health in Chinese American families. *Pediatrics*, 146. e2020021816, <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2020-021816>
- Clough, J., Lee, S., & Chae, D. H. (2013). Barriers to health care among Asian immigrants in the United States: a traditional review. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, 24, 384-403.
- Dahlen, H. M. (2016). The Impact of Maternal Depression on Child Academic and Socioemotional Outcomes. *Economics of Education Review*, 52, 77-90.
- Dalton, L., Rapa, E., & Stein, A. (2020). Protecting the psychological health of children through effective communication about COVID-19. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, 4, 346-347.
- Freire, P. (1973). *Education for critical consciousness*. New York, NY: Continuum.
- Hamm, J. V. (2001). Barriers and bridges to positive cross-ethnic relations: African American and White parent socialization beliefs and practices. *Youth & Society*, 33, 62-98.
- Havewala, M., Felton, J. W., & Lejuez, C. W. (2019). Friendship quality moderates the relation between maternal anxiety and trajectories of adolescent internalizing symptoms. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*, 41, 495-506.
- Hess, S., & Pollmann-Schult, M. (2020). Associations between mothers' work-family conflict and children's psychological well-being: The mediating role of mothers' parenting behavior. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 29, 1561-1571.
- Idoiaga, N., Berasategi, N., Eiguren, A., & Picaza, M. (2020). Exploring children's social and emotional representations of the Covid-19 pandemic. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 1952. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01952>
- Jiao, W. Y., Wang, L. N., Liu, J., Fang, S. F., Jiao, F. Y., Pettoello-Mantovani, M., & Somekh, E. (2020). Behavioral and emotional disorders in children during the COVID-19 epidemic. *The journal of Pediatrics*, 221, 264-266.
- Kawai, Y. (2005) Stereotyping Asian Americans: The dialectic of the model minority and the yellow peril. *The Howard Journal of Communications*, 16, 109-130.
- Kiang, L., Tseng, V., & Yip, T. (2016). Placing Asian American child development within historical context. *Child Development*, 87, 995-1013.
- Lee, S., & Waters, S. F. (2020). Asians and Asian Americans' experiences of racial discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic: Impacts on health outcomes and the buffering role of social support. *Stigma and Health*, 6, 70-78.
- Lee, T. (1996). *Unraveling the "model-minority" stereotype: Listening to Asian-American youth*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Litam, S. D. A., & Oh, S. (2020). Ethnic identity and coping strategies as moderators of COVID-19 racial discrimination experiences among Chinese Americans. *Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation*. Advance online publication: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21501378.2020.1814138>
- Masonbrink, A. R., & Hurley, E. (2020). Advocating for children during the COVID-19 school closures. *Pediatrics*, 146(3). e20201440. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2020-1440>
- NBC News (2020, March). Coronavirus fears show how 'model minority' Asian Americans become the 'yellow peril.' Retrieved from: <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/coronavirus-fears-show-how-model-minority-asian-americans-become-yellow-ncna1151671>
- Ngo, B., & Lee, S. J. (2007). Complicating the image of model minority success: A review of Southeast Asian American education. *Review of Educational Research*, 77, 415-453.
- Prime, H., Wade, M., & Browne, D. T. (2020). Risk and resilience in family well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. *American Psychologist*, 75, 631-643.
- Rothstein, R., & Olympia, R. P. (2020). School nurses on the front lines of healthcare: The approach to maintaining student health and wellness during COVID-19 school closures. *NASN School Nurse*, 35, 269-275.
- Schmidt, A., Kramer, A., Brose, A., Schmiedek, F., & Neubauer, A. (2020). Homeschooling and affective well-being of parents and children during the COVID-19 pandemic: A daily diary study. Preprint.
- Singh, S., Roy, M. D., Sinha, C. P. T. M. K., Parveen, C. P. T. M. S., Sharma, C. P. T. G., & Joshi, C. P. T. G. (2020). Impact of COVID-19 and lockdown on mental health of children and adolescents: A narrative review with recommendations. *Psychiatry Research*. Advance online publication: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.113429>
- Stop AAPI Hate (2021). AAPI Hate National Report. Retrieved from: <https://stopaapihate.org/national-report-through-march-2021/>
- Suzuki, B. H. (2002). Revisiting the model minority stereotype: Implications for student affairs practice and higher education. In M. K. McEwen, C. M. Kodama, A. N. Alvarez, S. Lee, & C. T. H. Liang (Eds.) *Working with Asian American college students: New directions for student services* (pp. 21-32). Jossey-Bass.
- Tang, S., Xiang, M., Cheung, T., & Xiang, Y. T. (2021). Mental health and its correlates among children and adolescents during COVID-19 school closure: The importance of parent-child discussion. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 279, 353-360.
- Watts, R. J., Diemer, M. A., & Voight, A. M. (2011). Critical consciousness: Current status and future directions [Special issue]. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 201, 43-57.
- Wu, J., & Kim, D. Y. (2014). The model minority myth for noncitizen immigration offenses and sentencing outcomes. *Race and Justice*, 4(4), 303-332.

About the Author



Yeram Cheong, Ph.D. is the 2020-22 Calvin J. Li Postdoctoral Fellow in the Asian American Studies Program. She received her Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology at the University of California, Riverside. Dr. Cheong's research interests include the cultural context and family processes in children's development and learning among historically underrepresented and immigrant families.

Coordinated by the
Calvin J. Li
Postdoc Fellow

The **Calvin J. Li Postdoctoral Fellowship**, proudly hosted by the Asian American Studies Program at the University of Maryland, is intended to support a recent PhD with expertise in the issues facing second generation children of Asian immigrants to the United States, such as identity formation, racial and ethnic representation, acculturation, transnationalism, family dynamics, or closely related topics. Li Fellows also teach courses related to their research for the Asian American Studies Program.

