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We Stand in Grief and Solidarity with the Asian American and Pacific Islander Communities

We are horrified and grieving at the increase in anti- Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) violence in the United States. This week's targeting of Asian American owned businesses in Atlanta, Georgia, and the murder of eight individuals, six of whom were Asian/Asian American women, has brought the sorrow and anger to the fore. The misogyny of this recent attack also reminds us of the intersectionality of race, gender, and class and how Asian women are often problematically perceived and treated as fetishized sexual objects. We write in solidarity, standing against anti-AAPI racism. We also stand against racism against Black, Indigenous, Latinx, immigrant, and sexual/gender and religious minority communities. And we seek to help SRCD become an actively anti-racist association.

Yesterday, for the first time in 34 years, the House Judiciary Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives held a hearing on Discrimination and Violence Against Asian Americans. We urge you to watch the recording of the hearing, read the written testimony presented, and also to read the excellent written testimony submitted by the Asian American Psychological Association.

The members of Congress and others who provided testimony stressed that the AAPI community has been facing two pandemics rather than one: (1) COVID-19 and its serious implications for employment and health, including for the many front-line workers in the AAPI community, and (2) a second pandemic of racism involving egregious accusations that Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders played a role in the inception and spreading of COVID-19.

Although some of us were aware that racism directed to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders began to increase around the start of the pandemic, startling data presented for the Congressional hearing present a picture that causes us great concern:

- During 2020, an increase of 149% in anti-AAPI hate crimes was documented in 16 major U.S. cities.
- Between March 19, 2020 to February 28, 2021, 3,795 incidents were reported to the organization Stop AAPI Hate. While reported incidents are undoubtedly an undercount of the total number of incidents, they help to illustrate the range and severity of experiences: 68% involved verbal harassment, 21% involved shunning, 11% involved physical assault and 9% involved civil rights violations, such as workplace discrimination or refusal of service. Women reported hate incidents 2.3 times more than men.
- Asian Americans were more likely than other groups to indicate that they had experienced slurs or jokes because of their race or ethnicity since the start of the pandemic, with 31% reporting such experiences, according to a June 2020 poll conducted by the Pew Research Center.

As developmental scientists, the evidence on the experiences of children and youth are of particular concern. A study by SRCD member and past chair of the SRCD Asian Caucus, Charissa Cheah, cited in the written testimony submitted by the Asian American Psychological Association, focusing specifically on Chinese American families, found that:

- About half of the parents and children in the sample (50.9% and 50.2%) reported experiencing racial discrimination at least once in person, while 31.7% and 45.7%, respectively, reported experiencing racial discrimination at least once online.
- A large majority of parents and children experienced vicarious discrimination by witnessing it at least once, although it was not directed to them, either online (76.8% and 76.5% respectively) or in person (88.5% and 91.9% respectively).
- About 25% of parents and children in the sample reported that they had experienced discrimination vicariously almost daily.
- Personally experiencing discrimination and witnessing another member of their racial-ethnic group being victimized were associated with higher levels of reported anxiety and depressive symptoms among parents as well as youth. Parents' discrimination experiences were also significantly associated with their children's self-reported internalizing and externalizing problems.
- In addition, for youth, witnessing another member of their racial-ethnic group being victimized was also associated with poorer psychological well-being.

What can we do?

First, we must make clear that we stand in solidarity against racism directed to the AAPI community and against all forms of discrimination against other minoritized communities. Second, we can use science to inform how we comfort and communicate with children and youth about the racist and misogynist violence that occurred in Atlanta. Third, as families and children resume in-person activities at child care centers, schools, and after-school programs, we can use evidence-informed decision-making to guide staff in in how to prevent, or if necessary, address incidents of racism in these settings. Finally, we must use history and science to proactively guide families and children reentering these contexts in being prepared to respond to and address racism that children witness or experience directly.

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