

Briefing Paper on the Health Impacts of Criminalization on APA Children, Youth and Families

Executive Summary

I. PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT:

The focus of this research paper was to gather baseline data on the health impacts of criminalization and incarceration on Asian Pacific American (APA) children, youth and families in California. The scope of the project was to:

- a) Conduct a literature search, review existing data and information and develop an annotated bibliography;
- b) Review existing health data;
- c) Identify and map APA service providers by the types of services and programs they offer to in order to discern potential resources and gaps in meeting the needs of this vulnerable population;
- d) Identify future research questions and research methodologies on this topic.

This information was to be used in identifying promising programmatic and strategic remediation, and help health clinics, providers, community-based organizations, government agencies, foundations, and policy makers in designing strategies for meeting the particular challenges facing APA communities.

II. INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE OF CRIMINALIZATION AND APA COMMUNITIES

The number of Asian Pacific Americans in the correctional system is small but growing. In California, APAs comprise only 3.4% of the prison population. Yet it is a growing population especially in the category of APA youth offenders. Furthermore, post-9/11 immigration policies have led to the detainment and deportation of thousands of men and boys (exact numbers are still unavailable) of South Asia and Middle Eastern descent. These policies have also led to the increased enforcement of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) thereby ensnaring many Southeast Asians caught in the criminal justice system who are now being detained and deported, even after serving time in prison.

The Asian Pacific American prison population remains invisible as a public policy issue even as this population slowly grows. Part of this "invisibility" includes a lack of quantitative and qualitative information about the impact of incarceration and criminalization on the health and well-being of children, youth and families of these APA prisoners/detainees.

III. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Issues and Concerns

Some of our findings from the literature review and analysis are:

- a) There were no studies that directly focused on the health impacts of criminalization on APA children, youth and families.
- b) Most of the health research in the field identifies incarceration and release as critical public health issues.
- c) There is absolutely no research, focused on the Pacific Islander community in California or in any state other than Hawaii.

- d) Two particular APA communities, Southeast Asians and South Asians, have been most impacted by recent changes in immigration/criminal justice policy.
- e) Most of the research on APAs and criminalization focus on juvenile offenders.
- f) A number of researchers have identified families of prisoners and ex-offenders as critical populations to keep in mind during health and public policy considerations.

2. Methodology: Steps and Limitations

In addition to an extensive literature search and review, we developed a list of 114 APA health-related organization from a pre-existing database developed by Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN). We used this list of APA health organizations to conduct a short phone interview, primarily with health providers and advocates. Though the questionnaire and initial design of the interview/survey was eventually abandoned due to problems with collecting consistent data, the information we were able to collect supported the data we had gathered from our literature review.

3. Recommendations on methodology and study design for future research

Since there is little research on this topic, many potential research projects can be developed. Some of these include:

1. Analyzing the mental health impacts of criminalization in the Southeast Asian community.
2. Studying the impact of incarceration on gender roles in APA communities, especially, South Asian and Southeast Asian communities that have had a traditionally patriarchal structure.
3. Researching the impact of detention and deportation on Southeast Asian and South Asian children.
4. Developing a baseline analysis of Pacific Islander communities in California.

Conclusion

The Asian Pacific American community is once again caught in the maelstrom of repressive immigration policies and the punitive criminal justice system. Yet each Asian American ethnic group experiences these policies differently. However the paucity of data allows for the continued invisibility of this growing population, especially in the eyes of policymakers, funders, researchers and public health services and advocates. The children, youth and families of these Asian Pacific American communities are the most vulnerable since few services, policies and programs are directed to them. Some APA communities in California have small populations relative to the size of the general population. However, incarceration/detention and deportation are taking a toll on the health and well-being of these affected communities precisely because they are so small. If social capital erodes in many urban communities due to a constant cycle of incarceration and release, questions arise about the sustainability of social capital if a generation of a community slowly disappears into the correctional system or out of the country due to deportation orders. Additionally, the removal of family members, especially young male family members, raises serious questions about the long-term viability of these APA communities in the U.S.