



Asian American Institute Fact Sheet: Asian Americans and Poverty

Background

Asian Americans are one of the fastest growing populations in the state of Illinois. While they are often seen as a homogenous group, in actuality, Asian Americans are an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse community. According to 2007 Census estimates, they number over 617,000, representing 5% of the state's population, an increase of 47% since 2000. In Illinois, this diverse and often-overlooked community includes Americans of Bangladeshi, Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Indian, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Nepali, Pakistani, Thai, Tibetan, and Vietnamese descent.



Asian Americans are forgotten voices in relation to poverty. Stories of successful Asian Americans decorate the front pages, such as the 1987 whiz kid issue of *Time*, which publicized data on Asian Americans attending and graduating college. These mainstream depictions often

stereotype Asian Americans as successful "model minorities" who have achieved the American dream; however, these portrayals mask poverty issues and other concerns within the Asian American community.

What is Poverty?

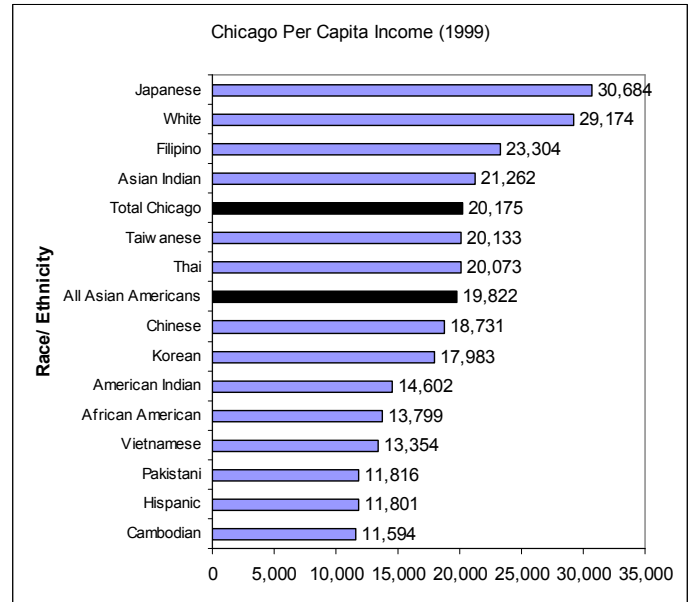
In 1969, the White House adopted an official method to measure poverty in the U.S. This method is based on the cheapest USDA meal plan, and assumes that an average household spends 1/3 of their income on food. Currently, the poverty line is \$21,386 for a family of 4 and this measure is used to define poverty in all 50 states.

How accurate is this measure of poverty? It does not take into account that the standard of living varies regionally, and that Asian Americans tend to live in areas with higher cost-of-living rates; a uniform federal poverty line ignores this factor. In addition, when poverty data are published, Asian Americans are usually included as a homogeneous category that fails to consider socioeconomic

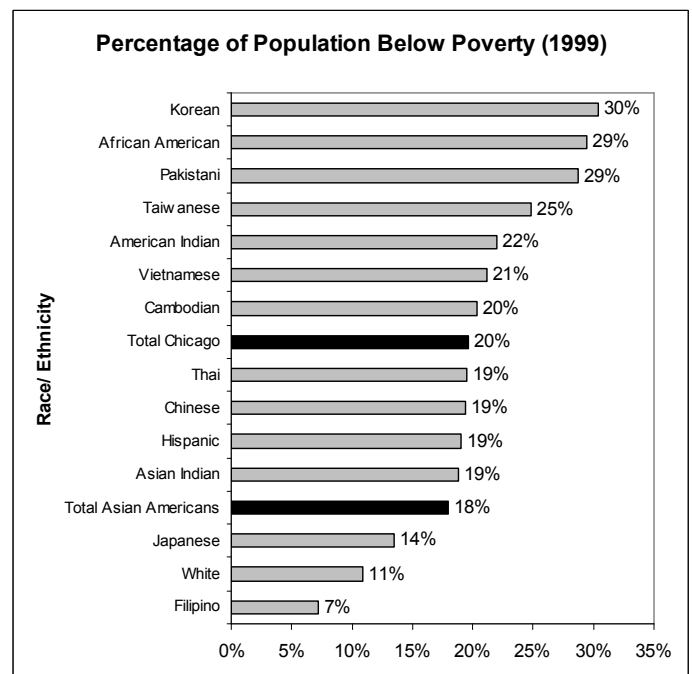
differences between ethnic communities. This serves to reinforce the model minority myth and marginalizes the real-life situations of Asian Americans in poverty.

Facts and Figures

A closer look reveals contrasts and disparities within Asian American communities. For example, according to the 2000 Census, Cambodians, Pakistanis, and Vietnamese Americans had among the lowest per capita incomes in the city of Chicago:



In addition, the 2000 Census shows that Chicago's Korean American community has a poverty rate of 30%, the highest rate of all racial and ethnic groups citywide:

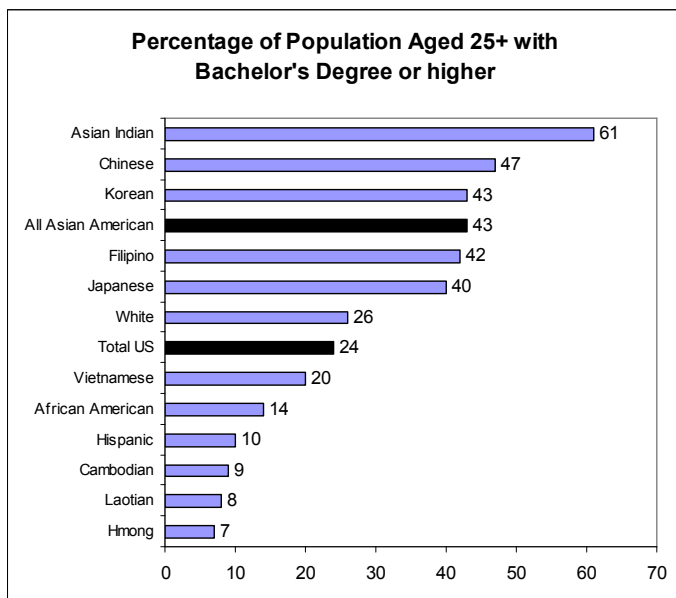


Community Issues and Needs

According to the 2000 Census, 70% of Asian Americans in Chicago are immigrants or refugees. In Chicago, 35% of Asian American households are linguistically isolated, meaning that no one aged 14 or older speaks English very well. Thus interpretation and translation are critical services for this population.

Asian Americans are often stereotyped as concentrating in the health sciences, yet access to affordable quality health care is a concern for a large segment of this population. According to the 2001 Commonwealth Fund Health Care Quality Survey, 52% of Korean Americans and 32% of Vietnamese Americans nationwide had no health insurance, compared to just 15% of the total US population. In addition, the same study found that Asian Americans were more likely to report communication problems with their physicians, and less likely to receive cancer screenings.

Though Asian Americans are commonly viewed as a highly educated group, when Asian American data are disaggregated, clear disparities are found in educational attainment, as illustrated by the following Census 2000 data as analyzed by the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC):



From Invisibility to Action: What You Can Do

Asian Americans in poverty face many barriers and struggles that often go unseen in the public eye. What can we do about this?

One direct way to impact the community is to participate in the upcoming April 2010 U.S. Census. Census data are used by governmental agencies, social service organizations, health care providers, and others to determine how resources should be allocated and to whom. Filling out the census form will help provide an accurate count of Asian Americans, to identify community assets and unmet needs.

Another way to get involved in the fight against poverty is to educate the public on Asian Americans in poverty. We welcome volunteers to assist us in reaching out to community and professional groups and contacting the media.

To join the Asian American Institute in our advocacy and education work, **please contact:**



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Sources

U.S. Census Bureau: <http://www.census.gov>

Hughes, Dora L., M.D., Quality of Health Care for Asian Americans, Findings from the 2001 Commonwealth Fund Health Care Quality Survey, 2002: www.commonwealthfund.org.

Southeast Asia Resource Action Center: Southeast Asian American Statistical Profile, 2004, www.searac.org.

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