

AMPLIFYING COMMUNITY VOICES

A forum
on anti-Asian racism
from youth & parent
perspectives

May 16, 2023

EVENT SUMMARY

Identified issues, challenges, strategies, and action items





MY SCRIPT MY VOICE

My Script My Voice is a university-community partnership. Operating on the principles of collaboration and mutual exchange, this partnership brings together community-based organizations, collectives, and educators that work with Asian youth and parents as well as scholars with access to structures that regularly support community-engaged scholarship. The ethic of collaboration guides the co-shaping of the research design, data collection and analysis, and knowledge mobilization, while the “on-the-ground” perspectives of Asian youth and parents, service providers, and educators ensure that practicality and usability remain central to this research. Engaging the perspectives and input of various stakeholders, the project develops linkages across academic and non-academic partners while adhering to the tenets and principles of community-based research.

Read more about our mission and anti-Asian racism initiatives for youth and parents on our website at myscriptmyvoice.com.

“Amplifying Community Voices: A Forum on Anti-Asian Racism from Youth & Parents Perspectives” was organized by the **Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto**, in collaboration with the partners below. This event was supported in part by funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and led by **Dr. Lin Fang**.

Hong Fook Mental Health Association (HFMA)

Established in 1982, Hong Fook Mental Health Association is the leading ethno-cultural community mental health agency with a consolidated culturally competent team serving Asian and other communities in the Greater Toronto Area. Hong Fook provides a continuum of mental health services covering the spectrum from “promoting wellness” to “managing illness” in Cambodian, Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin), Korean, Vietnamese and English.

The Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter (CCNCTO)

CCNCTO was formed in 1985. They are a non-profit organization made up of Chinese Canadians in the Greater Toronto Area that promote equity, social justice, inclusive civic participation, and respect for diversity.

The Asian Canadian Living Archive (TACLA)

TACLA is a Toronto-based pan-Asian initiative consisting of 6 staff members involved in grassroots community engagement and archiving projects since being established in 2018.

Scarborough Youth United (SYU)

SYU is a non-profit grassroots youth group that provides space for immigrant/migrant youth to share their concerns and take leadership in engaging with their communities to address those concerns.

INTRODUCTION

Amplifying Community Voices (ACV), a forum on anti-Asian racism from youth and parent perspectives, took place at the University of Toronto on May 16th, 2023. This event brought together over 60 members of our community, representing various groups such as youth, students, parents, educators, service providers, and more, to learn, discuss, and reflect on anti-Asian racism (AAR) and how it affects members of our community. This report consists of information summarized from: 1) small breakout groups, 2) large group discussions, and 3) interactive Mentimeter polls. Overall, the event sparked important and meaningful conversations between participants. Their discussions identified a number of issues and challenges participants encounter daily in relation to anti-Asian racism, and developed various strategies and action items to raise awareness and implement change to address anti-Asian racism in our communities. Below we review the issues and challenges identified at the family, school, and larger societal levels, and proposed strategies and action items identified by forum participants.

ISSUES & CHALLENGES

CHALLENGES WITHIN FAMILY ENVIRONMENTS

One overarching issue identified by participants of the forum is **intergenerational challenges within families**. Presentations at the ACV forum shed light on how intergenerational differences can have a significant impact on how youth and parents address anti-Asian racism, and how these differences could lead to consequences that hinder how AAR is perceived. As raised by participants from different breakout groups, there exist drastic differences and values between the older generation and younger generation, specifically with the children who grew up in Western cultures. For example, participants expressed that a common cultural practice amongst older, Asian parents is to stay quiet, avoid being outspoken, and do not cause trouble. On the other hand, youth tend to value speaking out and standing up for themselves when necessary. The different perspectives between generations could lead to miscommunication and misunderstandings between parents and children, ultimately leading children to feel that they cannot speak to their parents about the issue

of AAR. As a result, youth often feel a sense of confusion, lacking clear guidance on the most effective approach to navigate situations involving AAR.

During the breakout groups, participants also recognized that many **parents face challenges in understanding and discussing racism and AAR with their children**. Issues of racism and AAR are not only a new phenomenon for kids, but oftentimes immigrant parents are also dealing with these issues and topics for the first time after moving out of their home country. Immigrant parents are likely not prepared for these situations and conversations, and may be hesitant in admitting the existence of AAR as a whole. Nonetheless, it is important for parents to recognize the presence of racism in their own lives as well as their children's. Without adequate and appropriate resources for parents, they will face obstacles in effectively guiding their children to address issues of racism and AAR.

Participants of ACV also identified **language barriers and parenting styles** to be contributing factors to the intergenerational challenges in addressing AAR between

parents and children. Many parents expressed that since their English is not good and that their children's Chinese is not good, the language barrier and lack of vocabulary present a significant challenge for parents and children to have meaningful discussions regarding racism and AAR and how to best deal with these issues. Furthermore, as Asian parenting styles are often authoritarian, parents tend to not provide sufficient support for their children who express views on topics such as racism, bullying, and mental health. As a result, important conversations involving issues such as AAR are often disregarded and overlooked in Asian families.

CHALLENGES WITHIN SCHOOL SYSTEMS

The ACV forum included many participants from school boards, such as school board trustees and educators. Many participants expressed that there is a **lack of resources for students and educators in understanding and addressing AAR in school settings**. For instance, some participants expressed that while they receive education and training on Indigenous and anti-Black racism, there is not enough focus on anti-Asian racism or the promotion of Asian cultures in schools. To illustrate, one participant shared that during Asian heritage month, although there were Asian students in the classroom, they were not the ones given the opportunity to speak on the topic. The lack of education on Asian history, anti-Asian racism, and Asian voices in schools and educational organizations contribute to the lack of awareness and understanding of AAR issues for students and staff in educational sectors.

Despite the lack of awareness of AAR issues in school settings, many Asian youth shared their **lived experiences of AAR** at school. For example, one common incident amongst many Asian students is bringing cultural foods to school and being told by their peers that their food smelt bad. The lack of resources and education on AAR in schools not only pose a challenge for youth in learning how to deal with instances of AAR, but also pose a challenge for them in identifying cases of racism and microaggressions, ultimately contributing to the greater issue of the lack of recognition of AAR within the broader community. Thus,

discrimination in schools necessitates educating and training educators and school staff to help students better understand and address issues of racism.

Moreover, an important job of the school is to bridge the gap between students and families, but many participants shared that **schools do not provide enough resources and support for parents** to discuss racism with their children. For example, schools do not provide adequate resources for immigrant families who may face language barriers in understanding and discussing issues of racism within their families. Schools must play a crucial role in equipping parents with the right tools to voice their concerns and access community resources in order to better connect parents with their children to understand and address racism. Improving engagement with schools can also contribute to parents' personal growth understanding and dealing with issues of racism.

CHALLENGES AT THE COMMUNITY & STRUCTURAL LEVEL

A common theme raised by many participants of the forum is that there is a **general lack of recognition and awareness of anti-Asian racism in the broader community**. Much of the research and literature on anti-racism involve Indigenous and Black communities, while Asian communities are often underrepresented. Participants noted several contributing factors to the lack of recognition of AAR.

One contributing factor to the lack of recognition of AAR is **the common, cultural practice of keeping your head down and remaining silent**. As said by one participant of the forum, "in Asian cultures, children are often taught to not bother others and do not be troublemakers." As a result, Asian youth who experience AAR may refrain from speaking out about their encounters, and do not seek help or report to administration. In the long run, as instances of AAR do not get reported, people may start to believe that AAR does not exist, and that racism is not prevalent for members of the Asian community.

Participants of the forum also expressed that the **model minority myth** is a contributing factor to the lack of awareness and recognition of AAR. The model minority myth, based on stereotypes, claims that Asians are hardworking, smart, and successful, thus are not discriminated against in society. The model minority myth suggests that members of the Asian community are doing well and succeeding, ultimately erasing racism against Asian communities. The myth is seen as

evidence to downplay and deny the impact of racism and discrimination on Asian communities, which can lead to the dangerous and false belief that Asian groups do not face discrimination in North America. Thus, forum participants noted that there is a challenge in getting people to really understand that AAR exists and being self-aware of how they can be affected by microaggressions due to stereotypes and myths.

STRATEGIES & ACTION ITEMS

During the breakout groups, participants also discussed various strategies and action items that can be done in their respective work setting and sector to address the issues and challenges identified previously. The group came up with three key strategies.

The first strategy identified by participants is the **increase of education for all members of society**, including students, parents, educators and more. It is important to create safe spaces for conversations and learning for all members of the community. This can include anti-oppressive training in institutions, regular community discussions, outreach and cross-sharing with different communities, and recreational and in-person communal events to bring people together to share with and educate one another. In addition, participants suggested schools to consistently provide workshops for both parents and children to educate them on anti-Asian racism, how to talk about racism with their children, how to support their children, and provide the necessary language resources for families. At the same time, the educational system needs to prioritize and provide mandatory training for educators and staff to understand racism by providing time for learning and resources, so that they can better support and help students who are dealing with issues of racism and AAR in schools. Student participants of the

forum shared that they believe change must begin at the top-level, where board directors, superintendents, and teachers are educated on issues of racism and AAR. There must be ongoing conversations and discussions between all members of the school board to ensure that these important conversations remain consistent and continuous.

The second strategy participants suggested is **to have safe spaces that bring Asian communities together and create a unified voice**. Participants suggested strategizing through solidarity, and to recognize the similarities and differences between groups. It is crucial for members of the Asian community to work together to create meaningful change. Rather than having many different perspectives of racism within the Asian community, having a collective voice and perspective can greatly benefit the community as a whole to address and face anti-Asian racism. To do so, members of the community should listen and learn from each other, be accepting of different perspectives and experiences, and engage with one another through community events to combat AAR.

The third strategy is having a **person-centered approach**. For example, participants expressed that the personal stories shared by presenters at the forum were powerful

and impactful. Having members of the Asian community, such as students and parents, share their personal stories can pull out the humanity of the issue, and storytelling between generations can help keep conversations of racism ongoing within the family. Additionally, having a person-centered approach that focuses on personal narratives and lived experiences of members of the Asian

community can raise meaningful conversations that help recognize cases of AAR, educate others on this issue, and allow affected members to directly voice their concerns and needs. Allowing members to directly voice their perspectives can help generate solutions that better target the specific needs and concerns of Asian communities.

CONCLUSION & PARTICIPANT TAKEAWAYS

The ACV forum provided a remarkable space and opportunity for students and youth leaders to share their perspectives and experiences on anti-Asian racism. Through their presentations, participants of the forum recognized the importance of student voice in spreading awareness of AAR. Participants expressed that the youth are the ones with the voice, power, and hope. As the youth leaders shared many important and powerful ideas regarding AAR, it is up to authority figures, sector leaders, and lawmakers to put these ideas into action and practice. Adults, educators, and researchers also have the responsibility to take action and continue to create safe spaces for students and youth to voice their perspectives and provide support for their ideas to facilitate meaningful change in our communities.

