

WHITE PAPER

PACIFIC REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON ASIANS AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS WITH DISABILITIES

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ASIANS AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS WITH DISABILITIES

DEMOGRAPHY AND CHARACTERISTICS OF ASIANS AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS:

According to the 2000 U.S. Bureau of the Census data, 10,476,678 Asians and Pacific Islanders reside in the United States, making up 3.7 percent of the total U.S. population. (Table 1). From 1990 to 2000, the number of identifying as Asian American, or Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander grew another 44 percent to 10 million for Asian Americans and 350,000 for Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (U.S. Census Bureau 2001).

Asians and Pacific Islanders are a very heterogeneous group-comprised of many different ethnicities (both new immigrants and persons whose families have been here for generations), languages, cultures, and persons of all socioeconomic classes. The major Asian groups are Chinese (24%), Filipino (18%), Asian Indian (16%), Vietnamese (11%), Korean (10%), Japanese (8%) and other Asian groups (13%) include Burmese, Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, and Tongan. The major Pacific Islander groups are Native Hawaiian (35%), Samoan (23%), Guamanian or Chamorro (15%), and other Pacific Island groups (27%) (U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000).

Ninety-six percent of Asians and Pacific Islanders reside in metropolitan areas (both inside and outside central cities) in two Western United States - California and Hawaii and three non-Western States - New York, Texas, and Illinois. (Table 2). More than half of this group (54%) lives in the West (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). The fastest growing Asians and Pacific Islanders are in Georgia, Nevada, North Carolina, Nebraska, Arizona, Delaware and New Mexico. There has been a steady increase of Asians and Pacific islanders migrating to the State of California since 1970. Presently, eleven percent (3.8 million) of the state of California's population (33.9 million) is Asians and Pacific Islanders.

Because of high recent rates of immigration to the U.S. from Pacific Rim countries, the Asian and Pacific Islander population has shifted from a predominantly U.S.-born population to a predominantly foreign-born population (62% of the total). Nearly half of the foreign born (47.8%) from Asia lives in the West (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). As a group, there is a great linguistic diversity. They speak over 100 languages and dialects. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of Asians and Pacific Islanders residing in the United States speak a language other than English at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 1997) and 34.8% have limited English proficiency.

Asians and Pacific Islanders have relatively high educational levels. Forty-four percent of Asian Americans age 25 years and over had a bachelor's degree or higher and 86 percent had at least a high school diploma in 2000, but there are

significant educational differences across subgroups (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001).

The 1999 median income for Asians and Pacific Islanders households was \$51,205, 42 percent of these households had incomes of \$75,000 or more (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The data on overall economic success of in the United States must be interpreted with great caution. In many cases, the median represents the combined income of multiple working persons per family. In 1999, Asian and Pacific Islanders had a poverty rate of 10.7 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001).

CIVIL RIGHTS ISSUES FACING ASIANS AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS:

In February 1992, the United States Commission on Civil Rights issued a report entitled "Civil Rights Issues Facing Asian Americans in the 1990s". In that report, it was stated that:

Asian Americans face serious civil rights problems that touch both U.S.- and foreign-born Asian Americans, and exist at all social and economic levels and in virtually all walks of life. They also confront institutional discrimination in numerous domains, such as places of work and schools, in accessing public services, and in the administration of justice. Asian Americans face prejudice and discrimination as a racial minority in this country. Many Asian Americans are immigrants and language minorities.

Their diversity means that the civil rights issues facing Asian Americans are themselves diverse, ranging from issues facing those who are not proficient in English, such as inadequate bilingual and English as a Second Language programs in our public schools, to issues affecting highly educated professionals, such as the existence of an invisible 'glass ceiling' that limits opportunities for Asian Americans at the top of their professions. Asian Americans do face widespread prejudice, discrimination, and barriers to equal opportunity. Asian Americans are frequently victims of racially motivated bigotry and violence; they face significant barriers to equal opportunity in education and employment; and they do not have equal access to a number of public services, including police protection, health care, and the court system.

Since this report was published in the early 1990s, many Asians and Pacific Islanders, especially those with disabilities, in lower socioeconomic strata and recent immigrants, have needs-including employment-that are still not being met. Ethnic and racial minorities in the United States face a social and economic environment of inequality that includes greater exposure to racism, discrimination, violence, and poverty. Living in poverty has the most measurable effect on the rates of mental illness. People in the lowest strata of income, education, and occupation (known as socioeconomic status) are about two to

three times more likely than those in the highest strata to have a mental disorder (Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Public Health Service, 2001)

CULTURE AND DISABILITY

Asians and Pacific Islanders are ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse, with different cultures, religious beliefs, languages, dialects, socioeconomic classes, and levels of education. Due to their migratory experience and history, Asians and Pacific Islanders also vary in terms of acculturation and assimilation (U.S. vs. foreign born, English vs. non-English speaking).

In general, Asians and Pacific Islanders (particularly the new immigrants) maintain their own traditional culture and values which emphasize close family and community ties instead of individual rights; self/inner control; a great respect for the relationship between (1) Lord and minister (loyalty, do his/her own assignment), (2) parents and children (filial piety), (3) husband and wife (respect the uniqueness and differences, equilibrium/balance than equality/sameness), (4) seniority and age (respect the seniors and elderly), (5) friends/companionship (fidelity, trust).

For the new immigrants, adjusting to a new culture and its values poses problems which include a language barrier, role transitions, employment issues, child care concerns, family planning, a generation gap between the immigrants who become parents and their American born offspring, cultural conflict (American vs. traditional values, individual vs. family ties), isolation (social dyslexia), and safety (racism, stereotype, anti-Asian prejudice, scapegoat). They tend to settle in concentrations in certain "safe" areas such as a Chinatown, Koreatown, Little Manila, Little Saigon, Little Taipei, or Little Tokyo. New Asian and Pacific Islander immigrants with a physical and/or mental disability can be considered as receiving a double dose of stressors in coping with the "foreign" environment.

Types of disabilities can be classified as either overt or covert. Overt disabilities are those in which there are external or physical abnormalities (e.g., craniofacial or limb malformation). Covert disabilities are those in which there are no external or visible abnormalities (e.g., diabetes mellitus, or mental disorders).

A multi-faceted view of the causation of either type of disabilities includes genetics, religious explanations, being possessed by evil spirit, bad luck, "infectious" and contagious, fatalistic (resignation to one's fate), moralistic (punitive, misconduct), cosmic or mystic (ancestor's deeds), physiological (Ying and Yang), psychological (shame and guilt), social (culture shock), and nutritional.

Asian and Pacific Islander families tend to sequester their disabled family member at home and hidden away from public view, particularly when the person

has a mental disability, genetic disorder, or other disorder with physical (overt) deformities, such as craniofacial deformities. A family seeks help when the family's tolerance and resources are exhausted, or when the person becomes unmanageable or exhibits grossly inappropriate behavior. By then, it might be too late for remedial measures. It can be even worse, if disabled persons are deprived from receiving help simply because new Asian and Pacific Islander immigrants and their families are not aware of the resources available in the community and the legal issues involved (e.g., all children with disabilities are entitled to receive special education services).

DISABILITY AND UNEMPLOYMENT

While awaiting data from the 2000 Census, in a 1994-1995 U.S. Census Bureau's report, 53.9 million Americans (20.6 percent of the total population of 261.8 million) reported that they had a disability. Of this total, there were 999,000 Asians and Pacific Islanders who reported disabilities (12.1 percent of the total of 8.3 million Asians and Pacific Islanders). Severe disability (an inability to perform a functional activity or role) affected 465,000 Asians and Pacific Islanders. Analyses of the 1996 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) data suggested that 19.7% of the general population, about 52.6 million people, live with some level of disability. SIPP data also suggested that about 33 million people (12.3 percent of the population) experienced a severe disability (McNeil 2001). Data released from the U.S. Census Bureau in 1996 reported 29.4 million working-age Americans with disabilities in the 21- to 64-year-old age group. Of this number, 52% were employed, 48% were unemployed. About 79% of the 14.2 million people with severe disabilities were jobless.

Despite popular perception, people with disabilities want to work. People with disabilities continually experience the highest unemployment rates, and they are the highest number living in poverty (Igasaki, 1999). People with disabilities face even more difficulties in employment and become marginalized from mainstream society when there is an economic downturn in the US. Their voices, "We want to work, where are the jobs?" must be heard. This issue must be addressed as a high priority for the nation.

Factors that contribute to high unemployment rates of persons with disabilities from culturally diverse backgrounds listed by the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (1998) include:

- People with disabilities from culturally diverse backgrounds experience twice the discrimination experienced by non-disabled people in the minority community. Both disability and race complicate the situation.
- There is disparity in rehabilitation services provided to minority persons with disabilities.
- Educational opportunities are less available and affordable to individuals with disabilities from culturally diverse backgrounds.

- Inadequate transportation and housing in disadvantaged communities intensify the employment barriers for minority people with disabilities.
- There is a lack of mentors and role models for minority individuals with disabilities in the workplace.
- Mainstream job coaching, on the job training and internships are often not readily available to minority individuals with disabilities.
- Both mainstream and minority communities and religious organizations tend to overlook their capability to support the employment of minority individuals with disabilities.
- Cultural differences are not clearly understood by individuals or organizations designing programs to support the employment of minority persons with disabilities.

SPECIAL ISSUES FACING ASIANS AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS WITH DISABILITIES:

Lack of Data

The lack of data on Asians and Pacific Islanders with disabilities has been a major problem. Reasons for this include a tendency for Asians and Pacific Islanders to under report and conceal information on their disabilities due to the above mentioned cultural factors (which leads into the lack of comprehensive incidence data on disabilities); the relatively young median age of Asians and Pacific Islanders (31.1 years); and the high proportion of Asians and Pacific Islanders who are foreign-born. Asians and Pacific Islanders' socio-demographic heterogeneity creates a great challenge in understanding the full extent of issues related to the disabilities they face. The mainstream society tends to stereotype Asian Americans as the "model minority", a group without significant problems. Perhaps as a consequence of this, there is only limited data on Asians and Pacific Islanders with disabilities.

In the July 1998 publication *Disabilities and Cultural Diversity*, the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities reported that :

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 1994-95 data approximately 72.2% of African Americans with disabilities and 51.9% of Hispanics with disabilities are not working. The data further show that 85.5% of African Americans and 75.4% of Hispanics with severe disabilities are not working. Individuals with disabilities who are members of other minority groups are also disproportionately represented among the unemployed. The employment circumstances facing minorities with disabilities are bleak. Attention to this issue must become a priority for the nation.

The number of Asian and Pacific Islanders with disabilities was not included in the publication.

To reiterate, to date only limited data on Asians and Pacific Islanders with disabilities has been made available and publicized. There is still incomplete knowledge and lack of clear understanding about employment of Asian and Pacific Islanders with disabilities because of the lack of statistics, i.e., no clear numbers about how many Asians and Pacific Islanders have disabilities (Igasaki, 1999).

Lack of Access to Services

While laws such as the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act), IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), and IEP (Individual Education Program) may be in place, access to services in the areas of education, physical health, mental health, vocational training, and jobs is limited for Asians and Pacific Islanders with disabilities.

There are 44 million people (16.3 percent of 272 million people) in the US having no medical insurance coverage, and 21.2 percent (2.3 million out of 10.9 million) of Asians and Pacific Islanders are without health insurance (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999). In California, there are 7.4 million people (22.1 percent of 33.3 million) have no medical insurance coverage. People with disabilities must be able to have access to comprehensive programs including prevention, treatment and rehabilitation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Working with disabled individuals and their family members involves two components: early crisis intervention and long-term intervention. Early crisis intervention includes when and how to inform families about the disabling condition, prognosis and treatment, how to deal with their immediate emotional reactions, and how to make decisions regarding the urgent treatment and management of the disability. Long-term intervention includes providing a team approach for treatment and rehabilitation planning; dealing with long-term emotional reactions and interventions (for children, building their self-esteem and independence and searching for strengths; for adults, rebuilding their self-esteem they have lost, dealing with feelings of helplessness, worthlessness, and hopelessness, and establishing self-support and independence); securing the family's stability including financial stability; balancing in family activities; and securing ongoing education, rehabilitation and employment.

Familiarizing Asians and Pacific Islanders with disabilities and their family members with a multi-modal approach allows for ongoing treatment planning, rehabilitation, and future employment. As disability rights is a concern for everyone because it is a basic civil right, Asians and Pacific Islanders with disabilities have to speak up and challenge issues. Disabilities are not something to be kept within the family. There is no reason to be ashamed of it. Only if it is out in the open can we remove the barriers. Asians and Pacific Islanders with

disabilities have rights and have to take the risk to come forward to fight for and to protect them, although this is not a very Asians and Pacific Islanders way to do, but it is a very American way to do. (Igasaki, 1999)

Because of the above mentioned differences of Asians and Pacific Islanders, it is now particularly appropriate to establish special programs, both culturally and linguistically competent, to better serve the needs of Asians and Pacific Islanders with disabilities, particularly recent immigrants and their children, with the following objectives and goals:

- To provide direct services, including crisis intervention: on-going medical, mental health, and rehabilitation services; and employment counseling to the various Asian and Pacific Islander communities.
- To provide indirect services, including information sharing, referral, and community education to overcome the stigma associated with disabilities.
- To provide active outreach and consultation to existing services, professionals, community leaders, and Asians and Pacific Islanders with disabilities and their family members.
- To conduct ongoing collaborative research projects so that meaningful data can be systematically collected in order to meet the needs of Asians and Pacific Islanders.
- To develop a training curriculum for the professionals and paraprofessionals who provide or are planning to provide services for Asians and Pacific Islanders with disabilities.
- To ensure allocation of adequate funding to recruit and retain multilingual and multicultural professionals of different disciplines who will help these special programs to provide unique services to Asians and Pacific Islanders with disabilities, i.e., effectively deal with linguistic and cultural barriers.
- To ensure adoption of affirmative action programs to increase the employment of Asians and Pacific Islanders with disabilities.
- To publicize the needs and availability of services through the print and electronic media, and to ensure that written materials are available in all appropriate languages.
- To develop a special program to meet the needs of specific groups e.g., children and elderly with disabilities.

Outreach to Children

For children, we must actively outreach to families so that all children with disabilities will be provided with opportunities for the earliest possible appropriate education, equal to that provided to others. Children are our future; special efforts must be made to ensure that Asian and Pacific Islander students with disabilities are not deprived of equal access to educational opportunity. In order to secure their rights in receiving higher education, better prepare them for future careers, and prevent discriminatory prejudice and biased decisions against their disabilities, admissions policies of colleges and universities should be regularly and thoroughly examined. Detailed data on the acceptance and rejection of Asian and Pacific Islander students with disabilities should be made available to the appropriate agencies and public for review.

Government Inter-Agency Coordination

All levels of the governmental agencies should establish regional offices, particularly in states where Asians and Pacific Islanders are heavily concentrated (e.g., California, Hawaii, and New York). They should periodically collect, analyze, and disseminate data on Asians and Pacific Islanders with disabilities.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) witnesses more overt violations and resistance to compliance with the ADA than any other civil rights area. Many are skeptical of whether the ADA can prevent discrimination (Igasaki, 1999). The impact of ADA in terms of making employment for people with disabilities more feasible or difficult needs to be thoroughly examined. Federal Agencies should review ADA-related activities and programs with State and local governments and private sectors regarding Asians and Pacific Islanders with disabilities. Surveys to measure the awareness, attitudes, and reactions of employers and the general population to the ADA should be conducted in Asian and Pacific Islander communities. Appropriate funds should be allotted for ongoing outreach programs to educate employers about the ADA and to promote the rights of Asians and Pacific Islanders with disabilities.

For Federal, State, and local governments, a Division of Asians and Pacific Islanders with Disabilities should be established to collect pertinent background data. These data are indispensable in assessing the current needs of Asians and Pacific Islanders with disabilities and in tailoring appropriate policies to meet their future needs, so that critical services of Asians and Pacific Islanders with disabilities will be provided, officially documented and politically recognized.

Staff with the linguistic skills and sensitivities needed to serve Asians and Pacific Islanders communities must be trained and recruited, especially for limited-English-proficient Asians and Pacific Islanders. Equally important, staff must be provided with opportunities to be promoted to higher positions so that they can take an active leadership role in developing relevant, practical, and ongoing services for Asians and Pacific Islanders with disabilities. Bilingual printed

materials, signs, and telecommunication means should be made available in the communities with a large numbers of limited-English-proficient Asians and Pacific Islanders.

CONCLUSION:

It is a great challenge to provide services to the Asians and Pacific Islanders with disabilities, as they are diverse in ethnicity, generation, language, dialect, culture, and socioeconomic needs. It is important for Asians and Pacific Islanders to receive comprehensive services at culturally and linguistically sensitive and congruent facilities. Becoming acquainted with the issues encountered by this group and the community resources available can further improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

Due to changes in demography and characteristics of Asian and Pacific Islander populations, it is necessary and appropriate for all professionals, interested individuals, and organizations working with the increasing numbers of Asians and Pacific Islanders with disabilities to become aware of their special needs. This is essential if services such as education, medical and mental health care, rehabilitation and employment counseling are to be ethnically and culturally congruent. Regarding employment issues, all levels of government, many different organizations, and employers large and small must work together to reverse the negative and bleak employment outlook for minorities with disabilities. Service providers should be aware of the types of disabilities and have a multi-faceted view of the etiology and styles of help-seeking expressed by Asians and Pacific Islanders with disabilities and their families. It is essential that culturally and linguistically sensitive services are provided to facilitate the employment of Asians and Pacific Islanders with disabilities (Pi, 1990 and 1992). We must emphasize the importance of having people with disabilities and diverse backgrounds working together for outreach, education and empowerment.

Helpful actions to improve the employment rate of individuals with disabilities from culturally diverse groups, published by the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (1998) include:

- **Learn More.** Focus on public awareness by learning more about minority disability issues.
- **Change Attitude.** Conduct sensitivity training and awareness sessions for staff.
- **Reach Out.** Involve minority persons with disabilities in organizational programs.
- **Make a Commitment.** Designate an organization official to serve as a disability specialist.
- **Help Tell the Story.** Publicize stories about this issue, whenever possible, in company and organization newsletters, newspapers and magazines. Focus on minority individuals with disabilities who are working successfully.

- **Educate.** Help improve employment opportunities for minority persons by addressing this problem at all minority-related conferences and other events.
- **Furnish Role Models.** Identify role models and mentors for minority persons with disabilities.
- **Recruit Wisely.** Utilize local recruiting sources such as area minority organizations, religious institutions and disability related organizations to identify qualified job applicants with disabilities from culturally diverse backgrounds.
- **Advance Training.** Include minority persons with disabilities in job training and upward-mobility training programs.
- **Provide Employment Opportunities.** Develop targeted internships and job programs for minority persons with disabilities.

The intent of this White Paper is to capture the current issues and cultural barriers of Asians and Pacific Islanders with Disabilities, and, to direct the challenge to this new coalition before us to create a strategic action plan for the immediate future. LET'S WORK TOGETHER!

Table 1. U.S. CENSUS ON ASIANS AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS

1970	1.5 million	
1980	3.5 million	
1990	7.3 million	(2.9% of the US population)
1997	9.6 million	(3.6% of the US population)
2000	10.5 million	(3.7% of the US population)

Table 2. TOP 10 COUNTIES RANKED BY ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER POPULATION in 2000

County	Estimated API Population (As of 7/1/1999)	Percent API	Rank of Percent API
1. Los Angeles, CA	1,253,291	13.4	16
2. Honolulu, HI	562,403	65.0	1
3. Orange, CA	371,738	13.5	15
4. Santa Clara, CA	364,196	22.1	6
5. Queens, NY	340,901	17.0	12
6. San Diego, CA	304,755	10.8	26
7. Alameda, CA	277,707	19.6	8
8. San Francisco, CA	273,301	36.6	5
9. Cook, IL	262,738	5.1	81
10. Harris, TX	191,182	5.9	66

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Counties Ranked by Asian and Pacific Islander Population, July 1, 1999.

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