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Abstract Category: Transformational Research

Abstract Title: Asians and Pacific Islanders, Disability, and Economic/Health Disparities:
Identifying the Causes of Severe Obstacles to Labor Market Participation

Introduction

Asian Pacific Islander (APIs) Americans generally enjoy higher employment rates and income levels than other ethnic minorities. However, when disability is considered, severe disparities become apparent. One study shows that APIs with disabilities have an employment rate of 27.4%, compared to African Americans with disabilities at 31.7% and Hispanics with disabilities at 38.2%. APIs are the fastest growing minority group in the U.S. Investigating this disparity is urgent and timely.

Results and Discussion

Focus groups we conducted with non-English speaking immigrants (Chinese immigrants in 2003, and Korean and Vietnamese immigrants in 2005) suggested that cultural barriers (e.g., shame attributable to disability) led to sequestering disabled API family members at home and a failure to seek rehabilitation services, resulting in low employment rates.

This project uses confirmative focus groups on employment with rarely examined API groups: Pacific Islanders, Thais, and Laotians with disabilities. Community organization partners will enable recruitment of participants. The digitally recorded focus groups will be transcribed and translated. Two research team members independently will code the transcripts, using themes generated through the earlier formative research. Data collection will occur in fall 2008, with preliminary results by mid-December 2008.

This research highlights a little known but severe disparity, the lack of access to employment by APIs with disabilities. The community-based participatory research approach incorporates culturally and linguistically appropriate methods that will guide development of an evidence-based community/regional-level intervention.

Lessons Learned/Conclusions

APIs with disabilities experience disparities in employment due to cultural barriers (e.g., shame, stigma) related to disability. These results, along with the earlier formative research, will be used to design a community/regional-level intervention aimed at reducing this substantial disparity by facilitating employment opportunities for APIs with disabilities. The intervention has the potential for use by other immigrant populations and for other highly stigmatized health conditions.