



National trends in school victimization among Asian American adolescents



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A B S T R A C T

Keywords:

Asian American
School victimization
Bullying
Racial discrimination
National Crime Victimization Survey
School Crime Supplement

The “model minority” perception of Asian American students often ignores the academic and social challenges that many face in schools. One area that has received less attention is the school victimization experiences of Asian American adolescents. While some qualitative researchers have explored factors contributing to school victimization in recent years, missing in the literature is the scope of these incidents among Asian Americans. This paper contributes to this literature by (1) examining national trends in the victimization of Asian American adolescents in schools over the last decade and (2) investigating how victimization varies according to their gender, socioeconomic status, and achievement levels. The results show that although Asian American adolescents are consistently less likely to be bullied relative to other students, they are more likely to report experiences of racial discrimination. Victimization incidents for Asian Americans also differ by gender and academic achievement levels.

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Introduction

The perception of Asian Americans as “model minorities” often overlooks the challenges that many face in the United States. Despite success in numerous sectors of U.S. society, Asian Americans continue to experience discrimination and unfair treatment at different institutional levels of society, such as in the workplace and labor market (Chou & Feagin, 2010). One area that receives less policy attention is the victimization of Asian American students within U.S. schools, a topic that is often overshadowed by the group's generally high level of academic achievement (Pew Research Center, 2012). However, studies show that Asian American adolescents report higher levels of peer discrimination and harassment than other racial and ethnic groups (Qin, Way, & Mukherjee, 2008; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Way, Santos, Niway, & Kim-Gervey, 2008). Yet, aside from sporadic media coverage of a few incidents of Asian American school victimization in recent years (see Hwang, 2011), the issue receives less attention in policy and education research. Indeed, a recent task force report on school bullying from leading scholars commissioned by the American Educational Research Association (AERA) makes no explicit mention of Asian Americans as a potentially vulnerable group (Espelage et al., 2013).

In the meantime, qualitative studies have contributed to understanding why high levels of peer discrimination, harassment, and other forms of school victimization happen to Asian American adolescents. Research indicates that peer

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discrimination of Asian Americans stems from linguistic differences, high levels of academic achievement, perceptions of teacher favoritism, and other stereotypes of Asian American students (Qin, Way, & Rana, 2008; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Way et al., 2008). However, while many of these studies provide rich accounts of the day-to-day experiences of Asian American students, few have quantitatively examined school victimization at the national level and over time. Understanding the national trends can provide more insight into the extent of school victimization for Asian Americans. Furthermore, awareness of these trends among teachers, counselors, school leaders, and parents can help further deconstruct misguided perceptions of Asian Americans as model minorities.

The purpose of our article is to complement and expand the limited research literature on the school victimization experiences of Asian Americans. Our study makes several critical contributions to the extant body of literature on school victimization. Utilizing data from the *School Crime Supplement* (SCS), we describe trends in school victimization for Asian American adolescents over the last decade. We also explore heterogeneity in Asian American adolescents' experiences of school victimization in terms of gender, family background, and academic achievement level. In the following section, we provide a definition of school victimization and present an overview of studies on the experiences of Asian American students. Next, we explain our data and analytic method. We then describe our findings and discuss the main results. Lastly, we discuss limitations of our study and implications for future research and practice.

Background

Defining school victimization

One of the challenges in understanding the extensive research literature on school victimization and bullying is that studies tend to define the terms 'victimization' and 'bullying' differently. The recent AERA task report provides examples of this confusion (Espelage et al., 2013). Traditionally, bullying has been defined as any unwanted, intentional, aggressive behavior that involved a real or perceived power imbalance that is often repeated over time (Olweus, 1993). This definition, however, is rarely used in research. Studies generally provide a definition of bullying or ask respondents to check from a list of behaviors (e.g., hitting and excluding), which are then summed into a scale. While some bullying behaviors may overlap with the broader definition of school victimization, the AERA task force report emphasizes the distinction of intentionality, repetition, and power in bullying. However, given the overlap between victimization and bullying, the report recommended assessing both, when feasible.

In this article, we adopt a broad definition of victimization to refer to a spectrum of experiences with varying degrees of severity (Maffini, Wong, & Shin, 2011). This can range from minor verbal or physical harassment to violent experiences, such as being attacked (Elias & Zins, 2003; Ho, 2008). Our primary rationale for this definition is to be consistent with the language used in the SCS, which focuses on two types of victimization experiences: bullying and verbal harassment due to race-related hate words. We describe how these behaviors differ in more detail in the methods section, but for the remainder of this article, unless noted, we use victimization as an umbrella term for these two types of incidents.

Asian Americans and school victimization

Prior research demonstrates that Asian American students consistently report higher levels of peer discrimination than students from other racial groups (Alvarez, Juang, & Liang, 2006; Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Greene, Way, & Pahl, 2006; Qin, Way, & Rana, 2008; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). Fisher et al. (2000) found that while African American and Latino students tended to experience more discrimination from adults, Asian American students reported higher levels of peer discrimination, such as being called names and excluded from social activities due to their race. Similarly, Rivas-Drake, Hughes, and Way (2008) reported that Chinese American adolescents experienced higher levels of teasing and harassment from their African American peers. Qualitative research with Chinese American adolescents showed that many mentioned ethnic and racial discrimination as challenges in peer relationships (Qin, Way, & Rana, 2008). Complicating these trends is that Asian American students experience both explicit discrimination in the form of physical and verbal harassment and implicit discrimination in the form of stereotypes (Fisher et al., 2000).

Importantly, higher rates of school victimization among Asian American youth have been linked to poor psychological and social outcomes. Peer discrimination has been found to impact self-esteem (Greene et al., 2006), depression (Juang & Cookston, 2009), stress (Grossman & Liang, 2008), and general well being (Liang, Grossman, & Deguchi, 2007). Qin, Way, and Rana's (2008) study of Chinese American adolescents in Boston and New York found that Chinese American boys, in particular, felt targeted for lacking physical size and strength, which affected how they understood masculinity and racial differences in schools. Niwa, Way, Okazaki, and Qin (2011) found that the psychological toll of discrimination for Chinese American students included social avoidance, fear and distrust of their schools, feelings of powerlessness, and even frustration with their own Chinese peers who were unable or unwilling to "fight back."

While much research has focused on documenting school victimization among Asian Americans, other studies have explored the factors that contribute to these experiences. Research from Rosenbloom and Way (2004) and Qin, Way, and Rana (2008) found that stereotypes of Asian Americans are often a key motivator of discrimination and harassment. Qin et al. noted that many Chinese American students reported being teased for speaking a different language or having an English accent. Asian Americans were also targets based upon their perceived identity as foreigners and status as immigrants. Many

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