



Centering AANHPI Survivors: Recommendations for Campus and Title IX Administrators

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Background

Asian, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) advocates and survivors have communicated [gaps](#) and a need for data about experiences of gender-based violence among AANHPI survivors in the higher education context in the United States (Bonistall Postel, 2020). The goal of this summary report is to highlight the unique experiences of sexual harassment, sexual assault, rape, stalking, and domestic and dating violence among AANHPI survivors and students and staff on college campuses. The particular needs of AANHPI survivors and students and staff have often been left out of mainstream gender-based violence and sexual violence initiatives, often resulting in campus prevention and response lacking adequate attention or support for these populations. The purpose of this report is to center those unique needs and experiences in a set of recommendations for how higher education, University and college campuses, Title IX, and communities can better support AANHPI survivors and students and staff.

This report is situated within a broader societal context of Asian American and Pacific Islanders, especially women, being targeted in incidents of violence, bias and hate across the United States. Reports of incidents of [discrimination against Asian American and Pacific Islander women](#) and non-binary folks in the US have increased drastically in recent years (Pillai & Lindsey, 2022). The Asian community has experienced continued incidents of violence against AANHPI people in the news, including the Atlanta spa shootings in 2021, and the deaths of Christina Yuna Lee and Michelle Go in New York. AANHPI students have also experienced horrific [violence on campuses](#) (Chang et al., 2021), including the tragic death of [Zhifan Dong](#), a Chinese international student at the University of Utah who was killed by her ex-boyfriend, raising questions about the University's failure to appropriately respond to domestic and dating violence (Schermele, 2022). For each of these extreme cases of violence reported in the media, we know there are many more reported cases of violence and harm that AANHPI survivors have faced, and even more that go unreported.

We hope that this report can be a resource for advocates, service providers and schools to improve policies and supports that center AANHPI students and survivors.

What We Did

This summary report was informed by 15 qualitative interviews with AANHPI survivors (both former and current students) with lived experience of campus gender-based, sexual or domestic/dating violence, or advocates with experience working with AANHPI survivors. Interview recruitment was mainly conducted via API-GBV email listserv and social media outreach on API-GBV channels. Most prospective interviewees were asked to fill out a form with demographic information, and were selected based on a diverse sample of ethnic identity, gender identity, geographic location, college or university size and location, international student status, and recency of experience. A few interviewees were reached through direct outreach based on their advocate position or known expertise.

We recognize that a central challenge of this report is that “AANHPI” represents a hugely diverse and heterogeneous population, of many different cultures, ethnicities, belief systems and experiences. Not every finding applies to every individual survivor, but by uplifting varied experiences of directly impacted people, we believe that these recommendations can support better resources, services and policies for everyone.

The findings in the report represent a synthesis of key ideas and themes we heard directly from the qualitative interviews. The recommendations are based on direct ideas from interviewees, as well as some interpretation and analysis from the API-GBV team. The report recommendations are largely geared towards college and University campuses and their local communities, as well as the US Department of Education and its interpretation of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. [20 U.S.C. 1681-1688](#). While Title IX impacts students and staff members in the K-12 context as well, this report focuses specifically on the higher education context.

This report was written by Mia Lou Bladin, with support from Grace Huang and the API-GBV team.



Findings and Recommendations

On-Campus Prevention Through Orientation Workshops

Most interviewees reported attending or participating in on-campus orientation information about rape, sexual assault, and domestic and dating violence prevention.

CONVERSATIONS AROUND VIOLENCE AND CONSENT

“It is a form of violence to keep students ignorant about sex.”

Finding: On-campus orientation and prevention sessions often focus on highlighting the most extreme forms of sexual assault and rape, but often leave out important conversations on how issues of manipulation, coercion, and consent relate to violence. Student survivors indicated that they didn’t always recognize sexual or dating violence due to this lack of understanding about the various forms that violence can take. Students aren’t always equipped to recognize what is inappropriate behavior until after an incident occurs.

Recommendation: On-campus orientation and prevention workshops must highlight more nuanced situations and incidents of gender-based violence, not only the most extreme cases. These campus education resources need to more fully inform students that sexual assault, sexual, domestic, and dating violence are not only the most extreme forms, but also highlight how power and affirmative consent can play a role in violence or unhealthy relationships.

On-Campus Prevention Through Orientation Workshops

MORE THAN ONE-OFF WORKSHOPS

Finding: Many survivors noted that violence prevention orientation sessions are not reaching everyone effectively through one-off workshops or online modules, and there is a need to find more effective and frequent ways of reaching the student body.

Recommendation: Schools must establish sustainable programs with continued and flexible funding dedicated towards sexual and dating violence prevention on campus, including Campus Grants from the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW). Prevention work takes time, and there is a need for longer funding timelines with less restrictions to allow campuses to invest in norm-changing efforts over longer time periods. In addition to sustainable prevention funding, schools should require campus Greek life and other campus social organizations to undergo specific workshops and training relevant to their contexts (i.e. workshops with Fraternities and Sororities and other social organizations such as ethnic affinity groups on campus that focus on violence prevention in the context of parties and social events). Ultimately, it is vital for prevention efforts to start even earlier, in primary and secondary education.

Cultural Stigma and Shame Surrounding Sex and Mental Health

NORMS AROUND SEX & RELATIONSHIPS

“The way I was raised to talk about these things was very different from the way other white Americans were raised.”

Finding: Many AANHPI survivors expressed that they were not raised in a culture where it was normal or accessible to talk about issues of sex, relationships, or mental health. Both AANHPI advocates and survivors noted that they held a lot of misinformation and ignorance around sex, dating, and relationships when they entered into college. A few AANHPI survivors noted that a lack of self esteem and assertiveness around these issues stemmed from cultural barriers to discussing these topics. Stigma and shame surrounding sex can make unwanted sexual encounters very difficult to discuss with family. Additionally, judgment can feel pervasive for survivors in small communities where everyone knows each other, and some survivors expressed feelings of victim blaming coming from their own communities and families.

Recommendation: Schools should support the availability of resources on campus that open up conversations about sex with AANHPI students, in culturally appropriate ways (including sexual health, healthy relationships, body positivity and mental health). This may include workshops or sessions for AANHPI identifying-students with AANHPI staff members or in partnership with off-campus culturally-specific survivor advocacy organizations. This is a particularly important recommendation for international students, who often face additional cultural barriers to bridging conversations around sex, healthy relationships and mental health.

Cultural Stigma and Shame Surrounding Sex and Mental Health

UNDER-REPORTING

Finding: There is a general sentiment from AANHPI survivors and advocates that underreporting is likely high among AANHPI survivors, rooted in these cultural barriers, and that there are likely more Asian and Pacific Islander student and staff survivors than we are aware of. Furthermore, AANHPI survivors with multiple intersecting identities (e.g. immigrant, international, LGBTQ+) are less likely to report due to stigma and fear of repercussions (fear of visa loss, fear of being outed, etc).

Recommendation: One AANHPI survivor suggested more on-campus spaces and events open to survivors that simply offer a safe space. For example, a healing-centered yoga class or a financial literacy class run through one of the campus support centers may offer survivors a safe space to engage with support, without feeling pressured to report or come forward before they are ready.

SEEKING HELP

“Not talking about your own emotions, I know that is a pretty big block for me and people in my community. Like ‘just move along’ or ‘why do you need to see a counselor?’”

Finding: AANHPI advocates and survivors noted cultural stigma and shame accompanying seeking help and accommodations. Stigma around mental health and seeking therapy leads to lower tendency to seek these services among AANHPI students and staff. Additionally, multiple survivors noted that academic pressure and expectations felt from family can compound shame and mental health issues, and prevent survivors from seeking academic accommodations

Recommendation: Schools should partner with culturally specific organizations to develop outreach and communications campaigns featuring AANHPI leaders and influencers promoting the value of mental health and counseling resources.

Cultural Stigma and Shame Surrounding Sex and Mental Health

CO-LOCATION OF RESOURCES

Finding: Some advocates noted that AANHPI students were more likely to utilize resources when services were co-located in the same physical space, such as survivor advocates and mental health counselors.

Recommendation: Campus support services for survivors should consider being co-located or closely located in order to facilitate students seeking additional resources for care or support. This includes services such as mental health, survivor advocacy, sexual health resources, and culturally-specific resources.

CULTURAL CHALLENGES WITH FAMILY

Finding: AANHPI student survivors can experience challenges with engaging their families as support systems. Survivors identified lack of family support or fear of engaging family, including students being told by family to “brush it off,” “be strong” and “try not to think about it.”

Recommendation: Campus policies and services cannot assume a supportive parent and family situation (as they often do). School policies should prioritize providing students with support, even when students may not want to involve their parents, or when students may not be able to receive resources or therapy when living at home.

Limitations of Campus Resources and Support

INTERSECTIONALITY OF RACE AND SEX-BASED DISCRIMINATION

Finding: Racism and Sexism are often entirely intertwined in the experiences of violence and harassment among AANHPI survivors. History of sexualization and fetishization of Asian women plays a role in violence, and can manifest through harmful stereotypes of Asian women being quiet and submissive. AANHPI survivors and advocates frequently discussed how racism and sexism were both involved in their experiences.

Recommendation: Schools should increase the integration training and coordination between entities addressing sex-based and race-based discrimination on campuses. Institutions should coordinate offices so that students don't have to go through entirely separate processes for the same incident. Title IX (sex-based discrimination) and Title VI (race and national origin discrimination) offices should better coordinate so students aren't being put through multiple processes unnecessarily. This could include students and staff participating in only one joint interview regarding reports of racism and sexism, rather than two separate interviews with each office. Staff in both offices need to be trained to handle both race- and sex-based discrimination complaints and understand how to support students through these processes in tandem. This kind of training can support a "no wrong door" policy for schools that better recognizes the intersectionality of racism and sexism in the experiences of AANHPI women and non-binary folks.

Limitations of Campus Resources and Support

LACK OF REPRESENTATION

"I didn't have a sense of there being other Asian survivors. It was such a non-conversation among Asian communities that I knew."

Finding: AANHPI survivors highlighted their perception of invisibility because sexual violence is often thought of as an issue only affecting White women. Some survivors noted that the representation of white survivors in the media and the lack of conversations in Asian or Pacific Islander communities surrounding violence made them unaware that this was an issue impacting their AANHPI peers. Furthermore, AANHPI advocates also discussed finding it challenging to open up conversations about anti-Asian racism in sexual violence and dating violence with other advocates.

Recommendation: Schools should provide validating and supportive spaces for AANHPI survivors to speak with and build community with other AANHPI survivors. This might look like AANHPI survivor support groups, and more actively and intentionally diversifying the staff at student survivor resource and advocacy centers on campus, to better demonstrate familiarity with the diversity of experiences of students.

Limitations of Campus Resources and Support

LACK OF STAFF DIVERSITY

"It would've made a difference to see a single Asian staff member."

Finding: Almost all interviewees noted that the Women's Resource Centers on their campus had mostly white staff and felt centered on white students, often making AANHPI students feel uncomfortable going to that space for support. Survivors noted that lack of knowledge about resources was not the barrier that prevented them from utilizing resources, but rather, a lack of comfort and trust with those resources. AANHPI survivors noted the importance of these on-campus supportive spaces having staff that "look like me." Many AANHPI survivors described the benefits of having an advocate, therapist or counselor with a similar cultural background. Survivors spoke to the idea of "not having to explain everything" and having a "mutual understanding" and comfort when speaking with someone with a shared cultural, racial and/or ethnic identity.

Recommendation: There is a significant need for more intentional efforts to diversity staff at student resource centers (including women's centers, survivor advocate centers, and Title IX offices)

Culturally-Specific and Culturally Safe Resources

ON-CAMPUS CULTURALLY-SPECIFIC RESOURCES

Finding: AANHPI student survivors and advocates expressed a strong need for more culturally-specific and culturally safe resources and services on-campus, including racial affinity support groups and on-campus cultural centers dedicated to supporting AANHPI students.

Recommendation: To the best of their abilities, schools should provide on-campus culturally-specific safe spaces for AANHPI survivors and students. This should include racial and ethnic affinity support groups for survivors and on-campus cultural centers for AANHPI students. For existing on-campus ethnic affinity groups or cultural centers, schools should prioritize sexual assault and dating violence training and resources for staff and volunteers.

CULTURAL COMPETENCY AND TRAUMA-INFORMED TRAININGS

“Everybody needs to have cultural safety training - everybody who would be interacting with a survivor.”

Finding: AANHPI survivors and advocates overwhelmingly highlighted the need for all staff who interact with survivors to receive better trauma-informed and cultural competency, awareness, and sensitivity training. This includes all Title IX office staff, faculty, academic advisors, administrators, case managers, campus police, health providers and anyone who might be engaged in the Title IX process.

Recommendation: Schools should partner with outside cultural organizations to conduct cultural competency training, and require all staff members who interact with students to participate in both trauma-informed and cultural competency training.

Culturally-Specific and Culturally Safe Resources

OFF-CAMPUS PARTNERSHIPS WITH CULTURALLY-SPECIFIC ORGANIZATIONS

“Giving choice to survivors is especially important. Being able to choose someone who understands and doesn’t make assumptions about your cultural background is important.”

Finding: A few advocates highlighted campus programs that set up effective partnerships with off-campus culturally-specific organizations for outside referrals to counseling and therapy, or training and workshops. These partnerships can be helpful to refer some AANHPI students to outside therapists and psychiatrists who share the same cultural, racial or ethnic identity or speak the same language. Some students said they feel more safe in confidentiality in off-campus resources, and outside resources may feel more trustworthy because they are not tied to the institution. One limitation noted surrounding external resources is that they are not able to assist with seeking on-campus support, accommodations or referrals, which can prevent forming a fully coordinated care team on campus. However, if on-campus resources aren’t able to provide the most culturally or linguistically appropriate services, partnerships with outside organizations may be the best way to provide students with the most supportive culturally appropriate resources.

Recommendation: Schools should set up partnerships with off-campus culturally-specific organizations and resources for AANHPI survivors. Off-campus culturally-specific organizations can create an option for more culturally appropriate training and workshops, as well as outside referrals to counseling or therapy for AANHPI students. Culturally-specific organizations benefit from building trust and relationships on campus so it’s important to cultivate a strong relationship between culturally-specific organizations and on-campus advocates and student organizations.

Barriers Faced by Asian and Pacific Islander International Students

FEAR OF LOSING IMMIGRATION STATUS

"[International students] are more aware of what you can and can't do because you're afraid of being deported. You don't want to talk about any issues to anyone who has any kind of authority, because that could put your Visa at stake."

Finding: Fears surrounding potentially losing student visas were a frequently mentioned barrier to reporting for international students. Fears of having a visa revoked, being deported and the disclosure of illegal activity (such as underage drinking) discourage international students from reporting or seeking support after an incident.

Recommendation: Schools and education to help international students navigate the Title IX process and understand the implications of engaging with Title IX. For international student programs, there should be a designated program and staff person dedicated to supporting students facing gender-based violence, in order to institutionalize support for students knowing their rights and providing them with accurate information surrounding the fears that prevent them from coming forward. This should include international student office staff training in Title IX and established relationships between the international student office and both the survivor advocacy campus programs and the Title IX office. Schools should develop clear policies that support survivors undergoing the trauma of domestic violence, dating violence, or sexual assault in maintaining good standing for the purposes of complying with the terms of their visas.

Barriers Faced by Asian and Pacific Islander International Students

LANGUAGE ACCESS

“When you’re in situations of trauma, you need to speak in the language you are comfortable speaking in. (...) In higher education institutions, there’s this belief that you have to speak English well enough and you don’t need any interpretation or translation. But I’ve definitely seen the need for language access.”

Finding: Often language access and support for international students is not available on campus, due to an unrealistic assumption that all students should be able to navigate systems in English without translation services. Language access for student survivors is especially important when students have faced situations of trauma. Furthermore, complex legal and medical language in the Title IX process can provide additional language barriers to students whose first language is not English.

Recommendation: Schools must provide full language access and translation services to students, ideally in the form of staff advocates or peer advocates on campus who can speak the language of the survivor. Schools should also provide translation of gender-based violence resources into the primary languages that their international student populations speak.

Barriers Faced by Asian and Pacific Islander International Students

ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

Finding: Isolation and loneliness are prevalent among international student survivors. International students can experience a unique level of isolation on campus, and can lack a strong support system or community. Often international students may experience a separation or “othering” on campus from domestic students. This greater isolation can influence students' willingness to report, and their mental health and resilience after an incident occurs. International students are also able to hide a lot of this from their families and traditional support systems when living in a different country, increasing the likelihood of isolation.

Recommendation: Peer advisor programs that engage earlier-arrived international students can provide good peer-to-peer support for students, including both community support to address isolation as well as language access. International student offices should also work to build community and trust with students, creating a greater support system for international students on campus.

CULTURAL NORMS

Finding: Cultural differences can limit international student knowledge around what is culturally “normal” in interpersonal interactions. Furthermore, international students, 2- generation immigrant students, and Native Hawaiian students can be particularly vulnerable to violence and stalking due to differences in cultural norms.

Recommendation: Asian, Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian students would benefit from conversations that openly discuss appropriate workplace behavior, sex, consent, and healthy relationships, without placing judgment on cultural differences. This might include workshops or peer-run sessions with international students to bridge these conversations early on in their college experiences.

Barriers Surrounding the Title IX Process and Resources

LACK OF TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

Finding: AANHPI survivors expressed a general lack of trust in school institutions and the Title IX process, and a belief that they may not be supported, preventing students from seeking resources. AANHPI survivors expressed a notable perception that Title IX prioritizes protecting the school administration and can be inaccessible to students.

Recommendation: Schools should make mechanisms for providing input and recommendations about the Title IX process more accessible to students, staff, and faculty. This should include language accessible processes. Title IX coordinators should be responsive to the needs of and feedback from students and staff. Furthermore, Title IX coordinators should actively work to build stronger relationships and trust on campus with the student body including student organizations.

LACK OF TITLE IX AWARENESS

Finding: Lack of knowledge and awareness about Title IX and what is included under Title IX is a barrier to students exploring this potential path.

Recommendation: Title IX coordinators should be more accessible to students and create a relationship with on-campus advocacy services and the student body. Furthermore, on-campus advocates should be adequately trained in Title IX in order to provide students with accurate information and awareness, even if they are not directly affiliated with the Title IX process.

Barriers Surrounding the Title IX Process and Resources

NEGATIVE PERCEPTION OF TITLE IX INVESTIGATIONS

Finding: AANHPI survivors expressed fear about the formal Title IX process and “investigation,” specifically noting a fear that investigators and employees engaged in the investigation would not understand the cultural context of their situations.

Recommendation: All staff that interact with students must undergo cultural sensitivity training and trauma-informed training. In particular, any staff that might interact with a survivor or potentially be engaged in the Title IX process through hearings, panels or other means.

FEAR SURROUNDING MANDATORY REPORTING

Finding: AANHPI survivors expressed some fear surrounding mandated reporters who are required under Title IX to report incidents to the University. Survivors expressed a desire for having more options for support for survivors that would not trigger mandatory reporting.

Recommendation: Schools should have clear website information and pamphlets easily available to students and staff about who is mandated to make reports about sexual and domestic violence, what they are obligated to report and to whom, as well as resource lists and contacts for confidential support.

Barriers Surrounding the Title IX Process and Resources

LEGAL AID FOR SURVIVORS

Finding: A few AANHPI survivors expressed a lack of legal support to help them navigate the Title IX process and felt disadvantaged and under-supported in the process when they didn't have the means to hire an attorney. International students are particularly vulnerable given lack of ability to access any legal aid without citizenship.

Recommendation: Students should be provided with free legal aid and support in navigating the complex Title IX process. Schools should partner with legal aid organizations that represent survivors, and schools with existing student legal representation offices should work to prioritize representation of survivors undergoing the process.

ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICES

Finding: Multiple student survivors noted that physical distance or inaccessibility of the Title IX office was a barrier to seeking out the resource. Additionally, survivors with disabilities can experience increased barriers to accessing support services.

Recommendation: Title IX offices (and other resources for students and survivors) should be as physically accessible as possible to students and provide other forms of remote access for affected students, staff, and faculty. These offices should meet ADA and other accessibility requirements, but should also be located in a space that is easy for survivors to access. Stronger relationships between the student disability office and the Title IX and survivor advocacy resources should be cultivated in order to better support survivors with disabilities and those who need additional access support after experiences of violence.

Harm and Peer Retaliation from Own Community

PERPETRATOR FROM SAME COMMUNITY

“Especially in a small community where everyone knows everyone else, having to report someone within your community is really scary.”

Finding: AANHPI survivors struggled with fear of reporting when the perpetrator was from the same community. Survivors discussed the tension of trying to protect the perpetrator and not wanting to negatively influence their life, especially due to being members of the same community.

Recommendation: Title IX coordinators and advocates should work with survivors to determine what justice looks like for them. For some survivors, justice may involve a formal Title IX procedure, while for others, separation from the perpetrator or an informal resolution may be what they prefer. Any action should center the survivor’s needs and desires.

PEER RETALIATION

“I felt gaslighted by members of my own community.”

Finding: AANHPI survivors can face peer retaliation and harassment from members of their own community. One survivor described peer retaliation as including “bullying,” “slut-shaming,” “dirty looks,” “isolation” in social spaces, and feeling “gaslighted” by their own community. Anticipation and fear of retaliation by peers was a concern expressed by a few survivors that prevented speaking out.

Recommendation: School partnerships with culturally-specific survivor advocacy organizations off-campus can allow AANHPI students to find support within their own cultural community. Partnerships between culturally-specific organizations and campuses can engage students through workshops and sessions to build greater understanding and support for survivors and address bias.

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