RESPONDING TO RACE/ETHNICITY QUESTIONS & ASIAN AMERICAN IDENTITY

NYU CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF **ASIAN AMERICAN HEALTH**

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WHO ARE ASIAN AMERICANS?

Here is what the Pew Research Center says about the term, 'Asian American:'

> "The term was popularized by U.S. student activists in the 1960s and was eventually adopted by the U.S. Census Bureau. However, the "Asian" label masks the diverse demographics and wide economic disparities across the largest national origin groups (such as Chinese, Indian, Filipino) and the less populous ones (such as Bhutanese, Hmong and Nepalese) living in America." (Ruiz et al, 2022)

Based on the 2020 Census, people who identify as Asian American alone make up 6% of the U.S. population (19.9 million people), and this portion increases to 7.2% if you include the 4.1 million multiracial people who identify as Asian American and at least one other race. The largest ethnic groups within the Asian American category are Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese Americans (Jones et al, 2021).

WHY SHOULD WE DISAGGREGATE ASIAN AMERICANS INTO EVEN SMALLER, MORE SPECIFIC RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUPS?

Asian Americans are diverse, with unique strengths and needs that policymakers should be aware of. When all Asian Americans are combined into one category, it can hide important differences – such as shared beliefs, cultures, and experiences - between ethnic groups with roots in the Asian continent. (Ruiz et al, 2022)

For example, the 2015-2019 California Health Interview Survey found that more than half (51%) of Asian American adults in California who felt they needed mental health services did not get the mental healthcare they needed. Mental wellbeing across different Asian American ethnic groups varied, ranging from 43% of Japanese to 61% of Vietnamese adults experiencing unmet needs for mental healthcare (Tse et al, 2021). These results illustrate the need for more customized health outreach and mental health services. Without disaggregated data collection, health systems would not know that mental health disparities exist for certain Asian American ethnic groups.

HOW SHOULD I RESPOND TO DISAGGREGATED QUESTIONS?

There is no 'right' way to answer questions about race and ethnicity. The way you respond to question(s) about race and ethnicity may also depend on how the question is formatted.

Self-reporting provides the most accurate responses to race and ethnicity questions. This means that these questions should be open-ended questions, giving people the opportunity to write in any response you wish. In this case, you should write out the race/ethnicity that you feel best represents your identity. If you identify with more than one racial/ethnic group, you should list all of them.

Sometimes, it can be hard for institutions and people who manage data to organize many written race/ethnicity responses, so instead they offer specific racial/ethnic categories for you to choose from. Including more specific race/ethnicity categories allows more options for accurate self-reporting.

Most forms will include a multiple-choice race/ethnicity question. In this case, the race/ethnicity options may vary. For example, there may only be one Asian American category, or there may be more specific categories to choose from. On some surveys, Asian Americans may be grouped together with Pacific Islanders into one "Asian American/Pacific Islander" category. You may or may not decide to select more specific groups. However, selecting all of the relevant racial/ethnic groups that you identify with is recommended for more accurate reporting.

Here are some example scenarios of how someone might respond to different race/ethnicity question formats:

Scenario 1: Multiple choice, limited disaggregated options; respondent identifies as Vietnamese American but prefers to only report as Asian American	**Scenario 2:** Multiple choice, limited disaggregated options; respondent identifies as Filipino and Korean (multiple select)
What is your race or ethnicity (check all that apply)? ☐ White ☐ Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish ☐ Black ☐ Middle Eastern or North African ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander ☑ Asian ☐ American Indian, Native, First Nations, Indigenous Peoples of the Americas, or Alaska Native ☐ Some other Race or ethnicity: _____ ☐ Don't know ☐ Prefer not to anser	**What is your race or ethnicity (check all that apply)?** ☐ White ☐ Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish ☐ Black ☐ Middle Eastern or North African ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander ☑ Asian ☐ American Indian, Native, First Nations, Indigenous Peoples of the Americas, or Alaska Native ☐ Some other Race or ethnicity: _____ ☐ Don't know ☐ Prefer not to anser
Since "Asian" was selected as your race or ethnicity, which group best represents your ethnicity or ancestry (check all that apply)? ☐ Indian / Asian Indian ☐ Chinese ☐ Filipino ☐ Guyanese ☐ Japanese ☐ Korean ☐ Nepali ☐ Taiwanses ☐ Thai ☐ Vietnamese ☐ Another option: _____ ☐ Don't know ☑ Prefer not to answer	**Since "Asian" was selected as your race or ethnicity, which group best represents your ethnicity or ancestry (check all that apply)?** ☐ Indian / Asian Indian ☐ Chinese ☑ Filipino ☐ Guyanese ☐ Japanese ☑ Korean ☐ Nepali ☐ Taiwanses ☐ Thai ☐ Vietnamese ☐ Another option: _____ ☐ Don't know ☐ Prefer not to answer

Scenario 3: Write-in only; respondent identifies as Pakistani	Scenario 4: Multiple choice, limited disaggregated options; respondent identifies as Hmong (choice not given)
What race or ethnicity best describes you? _Pakistani_	**Since "Asian" was selected as your race, which group best represents your ethnicity or ancestry (cehck all that apply)?** ☐ Indian ☐ Chinese ☐ Filipino ☐ Guyanese ☐ Japanese ☐ Korean ☐ Nepali ☐ Taiwanese ☐ Thai ☐ Vietnamese ☑ Another option: _Hmong_ ☐ Don't know ☐ Prefer not ot answer

WHAT DISAGGREGATED RACE/ETHNICITY GROUPS CAN I EXPECT TO SEE ON A FORM OR SURVEY?

The table below shows the different groups that can fall within the Asian American. In some regions of the U.S., these populations may be very small, so they are unlikely to be included as a specific multiple-choice option on all forms.

- Please note that this table may not include every single group that fits these categories, and it's possible that there is overlap between broad race groups. This means that some ethnic groups may fall under more than one racial category.

Category: Asian American		
Indian	Taiwanese	Bhutanese
Chinese	Thai	Pakistani
Filipino	Vietnamese	Hmong
Guyanese	Cambodian	Sri Lankan
Japanese	Bangladeshi	Malaysian
Korean	Burmese	Tibetan
Nepali	Indonesian	Another Asian American group not listed here

Alternatively, you may see different groupings of people that are based on regional divisions of the Asian continent. This might be helpful in situations where the Asian American populations are very small in a certain part of the U.S., but it's still important to have some level of disaggregation to understand the local population. For example:

- **Central Asians** may include (not limited to) Kazakh, Turkmen, or Uyghur populations
- **East Asians** may include (not limited to) Chinese, Korean, or Tibetan populations
- **Southeast Asians** may include (not limited to) Thai, Burmese, or Filipino populations.
- **South Asians** may include (not limited to) Bangladeshi, Indian, or Pakistani populations

As you can see, disaggregated categories might be different depending on the size of the local Asian American population and the decisions of local leaders. It is important to reach out to a community-based organization in your area that represents Asian American identities and ask if they are involved in these decisions, so they may advocate for data collection instruments that are appropriate and accurate.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Asian Pacific Institute on Gender Based Violence. **Census Data & API Identities.** 2022. Available from: https://www.api-gbv.org/resources/census-data-api-identities/

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Ruiz et al. **What it means to be Asian in America.** Pew Research Center. 2022 August 2. Available from: https://www.pewresearch.org/race-ethnicity/2022/08/02/what-it-means-to-be-asian-in-america

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