

## **Asian-Americans question 'model minority' portrayal in new study**

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### **Body**

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Knowing that **Asian-Americans** have done well in the United States instills pride in Paresh Pakhare, who grew up middle-class in urban India but found a better life here.

"I see in the culture, in Indian families, they have so much expectation for their kids," said Pakhare, who manages the Holiday Inn in San Pablo.

San Pablo Councilwoman Kathy Chao-Rothberg knows more than 1 million **Asian-Americans** live in poverty.

"They are the invisible population," said Chao-Rothberg, whose family fled war-torn Laos when she was 7.

Those two realities went buzzing through Asian-American communities and social media this week as a report came out depicting Asians as the **new** immigrants, educated, prosperous, happy -- more so than most Americans.

In a nation where TV images of immigration depict desperate Mexicans and Central Americans trying to hop a border fence, the report revealed that more immigrants are coming from Asia than Latin America.

But the Pew Research Center **portrayal** of **Asian-Americans** as the nation's best-adjusted group also disturbed many **Asian-Americans** who know that they -- or relatives and friends -- don't fit that rubric. Many **questioned** the survey's validity.

Sonny Le, who helped direct Bay Area outreach for the 2010 U.S. census, was among those looking askance at the glowing depiction.

Le remembers the crowded San Francisco apartment his family landed in when they fled Vietnam decades ago, and he **questions** whether a phone survey of **Asian-Americans** would represent reality.

"We thought ourselves middle-class then, for whatever reason," said the Oakland resident. "You're not going to find any newly arrived immigrant telling you they're poor or lower-class. We don't do that."

Although the survey of some 3,500 people of Asian descent noted their great diversity, the presentation of the group as overwhelmingly successful, hardworking, happy and mostly unconcerned with discrimination echoed a persistent stereotype, some said.

"Our greatest concern with the **study** was in its kind of monolithic **portrayal** of **Asian-Americans**," said Dan Ichinose, who directs the demographic unit of the Los Angeles-based Asian Pacific American Legal Center. "We're constantly facing this perception of our community as the **model minority**, but what we know through research is that there's significant diversity."

## Asian-Americans question 'model minority' portrayal in new study

Ichinose cited his group's report last year that exposed disparities under the Asian-American umbrella: Hmong Americans, many of whom live in the Central Valley, have the lowest incomes of any ethnic group nationwide. One of the nation's fastest-growing Asian immigrant groups -- Bangladeshis -- is also among the poorest. One in four Pakistani-Americans is uninsured. **Asian-Americans** are twice as likely as whites and blacks to have not seen a doctor in at least five years.

Pew spokeswoman Vidya Krishnamurthy said researchers were nuanced in their 157-page report, most of it based on a telephone survey conducted in eight languages.

"**Asian-Americans** are a distinctive group, and the population is by no means a monolith," reads one early passage.

Still, advocates were critical of everything from the provocative title -- "The Rise of **Asian Americans**" -- to the survey conclusions that **Asian-Americans** are wealthier, more educated and "more satisfied with their lives, finances and the direction of the country, and they place more value than other Americans do on marriage, parenthood, hard work and career success."

Many immigrants, including Latinos, emphasize work and family values, but blogger Calvin Ho said that doesn't get acknowledged in sweeping depictions of **Asian-Americans** reaching success by their own bootstraps. Pew's report in April that 75 percent of Latinos believe most people can get ahead if they work hard drew much less attention than the **new study** finding 69 percent of **Asian-Americans** believe the same.

The UCLA sociology graduate student said recognizing such complexity matters because "the **model minority** myth has been used to pit **Asian-Americans** against other **minorities**."

The Pew survey pegs **Asian-Americans** as having the highest household incomes of any group, but the Asian Pacific American Legal Center said that's in part because many Asian-American families have several workers living under the same roof.

When measured individually, **Asian-Americans** have lower incomes than whites.

## Graphic

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Prothsan Gurung, 9, right, of Nepalese descent and of Oakland, lines up for food during world refugee day at San Antonio Park in Oakland, Calif. on Friday, June 22, 2012. A recent report revealed that more immigrants are coming from Asia than Latin America. Oakland hosts many Bhutanese, Burmese and Cambodian refugees. (Jane Tyska/Staff)

Karenni refugees from Burma (Myanmar) Mary Naw, 9, left, Sue Meh, 10, Poe Meh, 11, and Bae Meh, 10, left to right, wait to perform a dance during world refugee day at San Antonio Park in Oakland, Calif. on Friday, June 22, 2012. A recent report revealed that more immigrants are coming from Asia than Latin America. Oakland hosts many Bhutanese, Burmese and Cambodian refugees. (Jane Tyska/Staff)

The Karenni group Ree Meh, composed of Burmese refugees, performs during world refugee day at San Antonio Park in Oakland, Calif. on Friday, June 22, 2012. A recent report revealed that more immigrants are coming from Asia than Latin America. Oakland hosts many Bhutanese, Burmese and Cambodian refugees. (Jane Tyska/Staff)

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