Hidden in Plain Sight: Asian Poverty in New York City

June 2018

Asian American Federation

Who We Are:

Established in 1989, the Asian American Federation (AAF) is a nonprofit leadership organization that represents and supports a network of nearly 70 Asian American community service organizations in New York City. Our mission is to raise the influence and well-being of the pan-Asian American community through research, policy advocacy, public awareness, and organizational development. We accomplish this by:

- ***Publishing research reports*** on the needs of the Asian American community;
- ***Advocating for policy recommendations*** based on our research;
- ***Creating special program initiatives*** that respond to emerging and unmet needs; and
- ***Investing in the growth of nonprofits*** that serve Asian American communities.

AAF's leadership role helps give a collective voice to the more than 20 ethnic groups—diverse in language, culture, and religion—that make up New York's Asian American community. We use our research to organize members and advocate on behalf of the community's needs. We ensure that there is an Asian American voice in public policy discussions about immigrant rights, healthcare, economic development, and much more. We secure funding to support new program initiatives and work together with our member organizations to bring these initiatives to scale. Finally, we provide technical assistance to our member organizations so that they can better serve their communities.

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Preface

Almost ten years have passed since the Asian American Federation's first report on Asian poverty in New York City, *Working But Poor (2008)*. Much has happened since the report was released. The Great Recession placed economic stresses on working families that had not been seen since the 1930s. The drop in housing prices, the primary means of storing wealth for much of the Asian community, meant economic hardship for previously financially secure families. The Trump presidency has brought new attacks on the social safety net and immigration in all forms, creating greater uncertainty for Asian immigrant families.

Under this backdrop, the Federation presents *Hidden in Plain Sight*, our update to our first report on Asian poverty in New York City. The goal of this report is to highlight this often overlooked segment of the Asian community. While many Asian New Yorkers have access to a wide range of economic opportunities, Asian working poor residing in this city face educational, linguistic, and economic barriers to well-paying jobs and careers. This report will help elected officials and policy makers make better decisions about policies that impact working poor Asians.

Another goal of our report is to galvanize the Asian working poor. Too long has this community been left out of the conversation on key issues such as immigration, education, and labor. Recent examples of the Asian community scrambling to engage government leaders include wage and worker safety issues in nail salons, the use of electric bicycles by food delivery workers, and the potential changes in the admissions process for New York City's specialized high schools.

All three issues directly impact low-income Asian New Yorkers and their families. The common theme that emerges is the Asian community being left out of the decision-making process. By empowering the community with our research, we hope that the growing number of Asian working poor and their advocates can better organize to engage with government and policy makers.

We would like to thank Wells Fargo and the New York City Council for their generous support for making this report possible. Special thanks to our policy and research intern, Fulton Hou, for his invaluable contributions to this report.

Jo-Ann Yoo
Executive Director
Asian American Federation

June 2018

Executive Summary

The Asian American community is one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in New York City, representing over 15 percent of the total population. The population encompasses a diverse range of ethnic groups, immigration backgrounds, and socioeconomic statuses. The Asian American community has spent decades establishing themselves, yet there has been a recurring narrative, called the 'model minority.' While this categorization highlights a small pocket of success, it ignores the harsh economic realities that many Asian Americans still experience. This report will highlight some of the findings related to poverty within the Asian American community from 2000 to 2016 in New York City as well as some of the growing communities in Upstate New York. The report concludes with policy recommendations that address the key challenges to tackling poverty in the Asian community.

Key findings include:

Upstate New York

- In Upstate New York, Asians living in poverty more than doubled from less than 19,000 in 2000 to close to 43,000 in 2016.
- The Asian poverty rate rose from 19.7 percent in 2000 to 23.1 percent in 2016.
- Asian poverty in the upstate region is largely concentrated in or near cities such as Albany, Binghamton, Buffalo, Ithaca, Rochester, Rome, Syracuse, and Utica.
- Asian population growth was driven in part by a wave of refugees resettled from Bhutan and Myanmar, countries that have not traditionally sent immigrants to the United States in large numbers.

New York City

- In New York City, the number of Asians living in poverty grew by 44 percent, from 170,000 in 2000 to more than 245,000 in 2016.
- Poverty rates are higher for Asian immigrants, both citizens and non-citizens, as Asian immigrants tend to be more recent arrivals. One in four Asian immigrants arrived to the United States less than 10 years ago, compared to 18 percent of non-Asian immigrants.
- Of immigrants in poverty, 70 percent of Asian immigrants and 59 percent of non-Asian immigrants had limited English proficiency (LEP).
- Asian child poverty rates increased from 2000 to 2016 by 1.4 percentage points.
- Among children in poverty, 43 percent of Asian children lived in a linguistically isolated household, compared to 19 percent of non-Asian children and 27 percent of Hispanic children.
- While 51 percent of non-Asian children in poverty were living with at least one immigrant parent, 96 percent of Asian children in poverty were living with at least one immigrant parent.
- The poverty rate for Asian seniors rose from 23.5 percent in 2000 to 24.8 percent in 2016.
- For seniors living in poverty, LEP rates were 83 percent for Asians, compared to 24 percent for non-Asians.
- English proficiency opened up economic opportunities for Asian workers. For Asian workers living in poverty, 63 percent had LEP, while for Asian workers living at or above the poverty threshold, only 40 percent had LEP.

- Two of the major occupational categories that Asian workers in poverty held were nail salon work and food delivery work, both of which have seen increased regulatory scrutiny at the state and local level.
- The restaurant and food service industry was a vital source of employment for Asian workers living in poverty, employing 21 percent of those workers. Among non-Asian workers living in poverty, only 10 percent were employed in this industry.
- Access to affordable housing and health insurance remain a challenge for Asians in poverty. Nine in ten Asian households in poverty were lacking affordable housing. One in four working-age Asians in poverty were uninsured.

To address poverty in the Asian community, the Asian American Federation recommends:

Expanding Economic and Workforce Development Opportunities

- Focusing workforce development programs on adult language learners to develop relevant workplace English skills.
- Creating opportunities for workers without educational credentials to learn new skills through workforce development bridge programs, for example.
- Developing pathways to adapt professional credentials of immigrant workers from their home country to the American workforce.
- Developing or expanding in-language outreach and training programs on the wage and labor protection standards that partner with community-based organizations, workers, and business owners to inform them why and how to comply.
- Creating in-language outreach programs that work with Asian-owned businesses where they are located to help them access resources to expand their businesses.

Strengthening Public Education and Outreach

- Fully implementing the language access law passed last year requiring city agencies to put into place translation services and translated documents in ten languages.
- Developing a comprehensive in-language outreach program particularly for poor and low-income Asian families to ensure that they have access to all the available pathways to educational success. Parents and children need a seat at the table in determining how their families will be impacted by major educational policy changes.

Funding for More Social Services and Healthcare Programs

- Maintaining funding for the Affordable Care Act Navigator program that helps Asian immigrants navigate the complex health insurance market.
- Setting aside parts of the social services budget for smaller contracts which community-based organizations can better compete for or recognize in the proposal evaluation process the value of language and cultural competency and established presence in immigrant neighborhoods.
- Building contract protections for social service subcontractors to prevent complete loss of funding when contracts are cut during tight budget eras.
- Tackling the lack of access for some Asian seniors to the social safety net by increasing access to employment opportunities to help healthy seniors build work experience. For example, the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) provides subsidized, part-time community service employment for low-income adults age 55 or older who have poor employment prospects.

Introduction

The Asian American community, particularly in New York City, has struggled to overcome the model minority myth. Elected officials and agency leaders continue to believe that Asian Americans are smoothly integrating with mainstream society, both socially and economically. Nothing can be further from the truth. The New York City Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity has been tracking poverty in New York City since 2005. According to their measures, the Asian population had the highest poverty rate in the City in 9 out of 12 years tracked, when compared with Blacks, Hispanics and Whites.

The Federal government's assault on the social safety net and the continued gap in social service funding for Asian-focused programs make an update to our previous report on poverty, *Working But Poor (2008),* timely and vital. Our 2015 report on city government social service contract data showed that only 1.4 percent of social service contracts went to programs designed to serve Asian New Yorkers, who are now 15 percent of the population.

This report quantifies what our member agencies are facing on the ground citywide, a rapidly growing population of poor Asian New Yorkers. This report will focus on New York City, but will also include a glance at upstate regions of New York State, which has seen an growing population of Asian residents. Our report will also cover the unique needs of Asian poor including language and cultural barriers, educational deficits, and lack of access to services. It is our firm belief that only culturally competent social services provided by agencies with deep roots and built-up trust in the community can best serve the Asian poor.

The report will utilize data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS). We will examine poverty from the dimensions of age, race, immigration, language abilities, educational levels, job opportunities, family types, health insurance coverage, geography and Asian ethnicity. The report will briefly touch on the alternative poverty measures generated by New York City Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity and discuss the implications of these measures.

For this report we will use the federal guidelines for determining poverty status as implemented by the U.S. Census Bureau, outlined at: https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-thresholds.html. The guidelines define a series of income thresholds based on family size and composition. A family is defined as living in poverty if their total family income falls below the given poverty threshold for the year. For example, the federal poverty threshold for a family of two adults and two children was $24,339 in 2016. Once a family is categorized as living in poverty, all members of the family are given the designation in the dataset.

Overview of New York State

The overall poverty rate for Asians living in New York State increased slightly from 2000 to 2016 (Figure 1). At the same time, the non-Hispanic White poverty rate has risen and Black and Hispanic poverty rates have fallen. However, even with a steady poverty rate, the rapid growth of the Asian population in New York State drove the total number of Asians in poverty up by 50 percent, from around 200,000 in 2000 to over 300,000 in 2016.

A regional breakdown of the poverty rates for Asian New Yorkers revealed that Asian poverty rate in upstate New York increased by more than three percentage points (Figure 2).[1] The other two regions had only seen less than one percentage point increases in Asian poverty rates.

Upstate New York saw the largest increase in Asian poverty rates.

Statewide, the Asian population in New York State continued to diversify. Some of the fastest growing portions of the Asian community also happened to be among the poorest. The six poorest Asian ethnicities had their populations at least double from 2000 to 2016 (Figure 3 and Table A in Appendix). In particular, the Burmese, Bhutanese, and Nepalese communities were too small in 2000 to be reported separately and have emerged in 2016 to be several thousand strong.

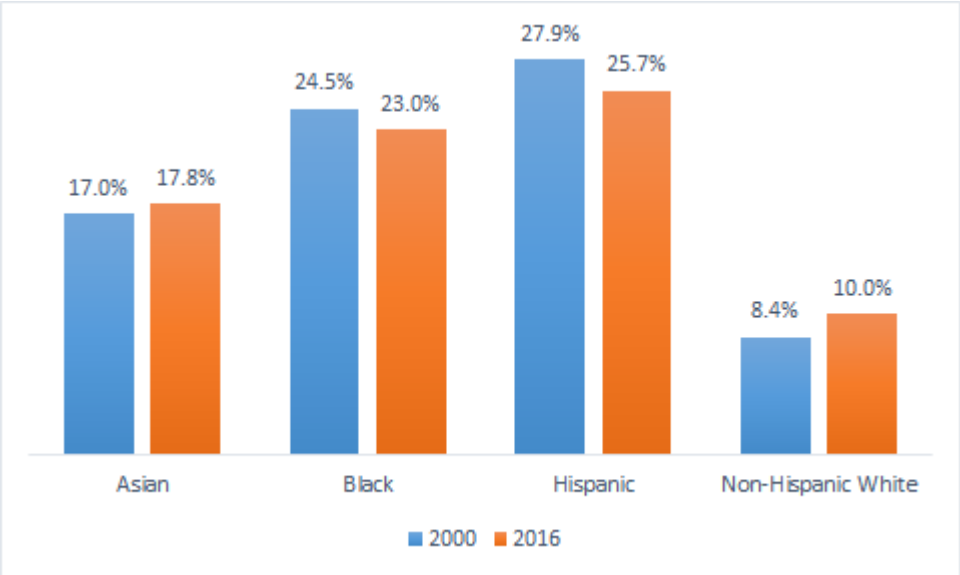


Figure 1: Statewide Poverty Rates by Major Race and Ethnicity

[1] For this study, New York State was divided into three regions: New York City, the suburban counties around New York City, and the upstate counties. The suburban counties were defined as Nassau and Suffolk counties on Long Island and the Hudson Valley counties of Westchester, Putnam, Rockland, Orange, and Dutchess.

Figure 2: Asian Poverty Rates by Region

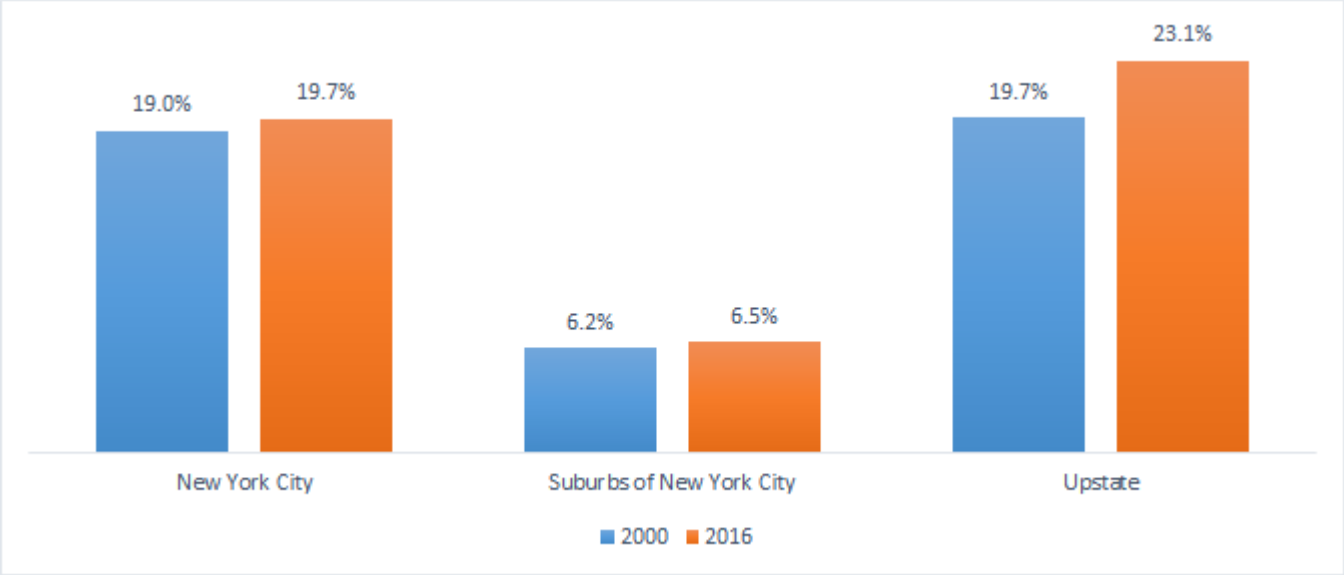
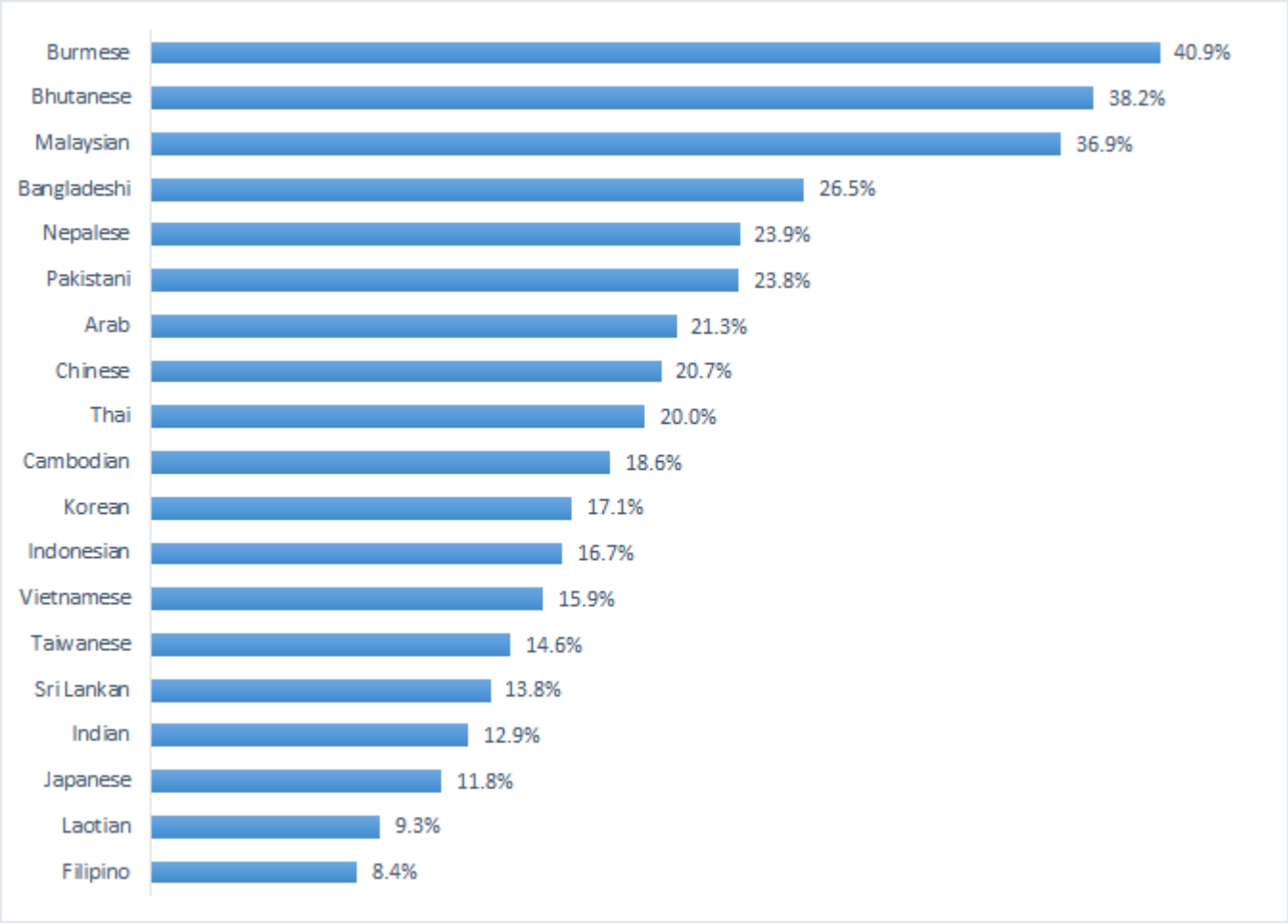


Figure 3: Statewide Asian Ethnicity Poverty Rates



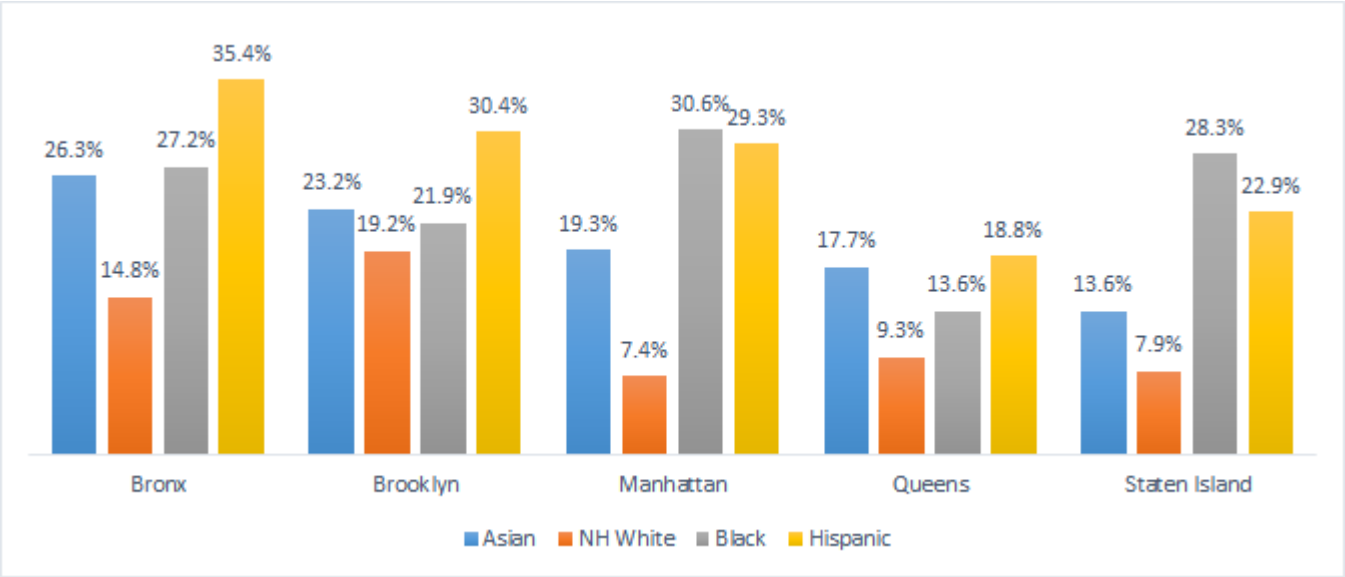
Upstate New York

While the main focus of this report will be on Asians residing in New York City, this section will touch on some of the factors contributing to the increase in poverty rates for Asians residing upstate. The Asian poverty rate in Upstate New York increased by 3.4 percentage points (Figure 2). Estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau's ACS showed that the number of Asians living in poverty in upstate counties more than doubled from less than 19,000 in 2000 to close to 43,000 in 2016.

Asian poverty in the upstate region was largely concentrated in or near cities. These cities had received a large influx of refugees from Bhutan and Myanmar, identified in the data as Bhutanese, Burmese and Nepalese. In New York State, the refugees who the Census Bureau classifies as "Burmese" were largely from ethnic minorities of Myanmar, such as Karen, Karenni and Chin. To these minorities, being identified as "Burmese", the ethnic majority in Myanmar, is offensive, due to the history of ethnic conflict. The Census Bureau is working to change how they report out these ethnicities. For now we must make due with the "Burmese" label, recognizing that for the upstate region this likely means one of the ethnic minorities of Myanmar. For refugees from Bhutan, the majority spoke Nepali, so some responded to the ACS by identify with their country of birth (Bhutanese) and others with their cultural roots (Nepalese).

The cities of Utica and Rome, located in Oneida County, had an Asian poverty rate of 18.5 percent. The Asian population were mostly Burmese, Vietnamese, and Cambodian. Syracuse, located in Onondaga County, had an Asian poverty rate of 25 percent. The largest Asian groups were Chinese, Indian, and Korean. Rochester, part of Monroe County, had an Asian poverty rate of 33 percent. The largest Asian groups were Chinese, Vietnamese, and Nepalese. Buffalo, part of Erie County had an Asian poverty rate of 31 percent. The largest Asian groups were Burmese, Indian, and Chinese. Albany, the state's capital, had an Asian poverty rate of 25 percent. The largest Asian groups were Chinese, Indian, and Burmese. Binghamton, located in Broome County, had an Asian poverty rate of 22 percent. The largest Asian groups in Binghamton were Chinese, Indian, and Laotian. The Asian population in Tompkins County was largely concentrated in the town and city of Ithaca and had a poverty rate of 21 percent. The largest Asian groups were Chinese, Korean, and Indian.

Figure 4: Asian Poverty by Borough for Major Race and Ethnicity



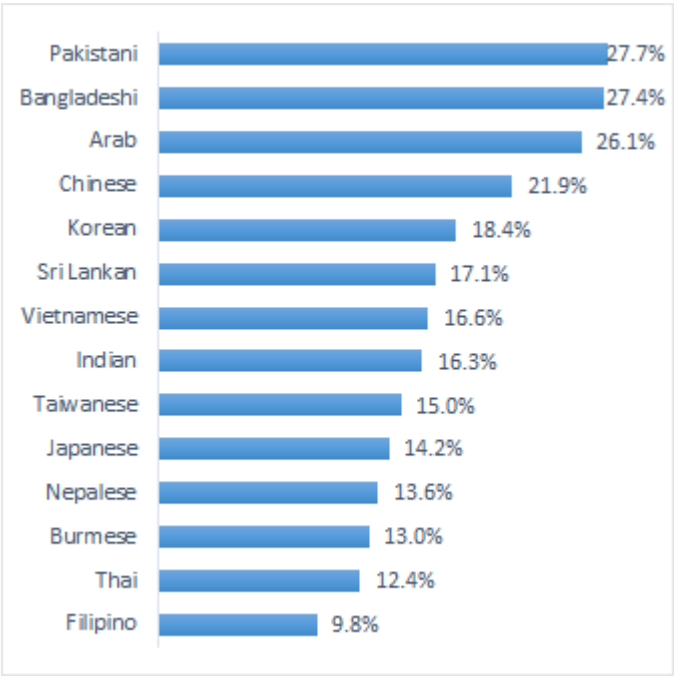
The remainder of this report will focus on Asians in New York City. While the poverty rate for Asians in New York City increased slightly (Figure 2), the continued rapid growth of the Asian population in New York City resulted in an increase of 44 percent in the number of Asians living in poverty, from 170,000 in 2000 to more than 245,000 in 2016.

A comparison of Asians to the other major race and ethnic groups in the city showed that Asians had higher poverty rates than non-Hispanic Whites across all boroughs (Figure 4). In Queens, home of the largest Asian population in the city, the Asian poverty rate exceeded that of Blacks and approaches that of Hispanics. Asian poverty rates in the Bronx and Brooklyn are comparable to that of Blacks.

By Asian ethnicity, the three ethnicities with the highest poverty rates saw substantial population increases (Figure 5). Both the Bangladeshi and Pakistani populations in New York City more than doubled, growing by 241 percent for Bangladeshis and 116 percent for Pakistanis (Appendix 1). The Chinese population, still the largest Asian ethnicity in the city, grew by 54 percent from a much larger population base.

This report includes data on the Arab community where available because they shared similar experiences and poverty rates with South Asian Muslim communities. The Arab community is harder to quantify because the Census Bureau does not ask about Arab ethnicity in the standard race questions.

Figure 5: Poverty Rates in New York City by Asian Ethnicities



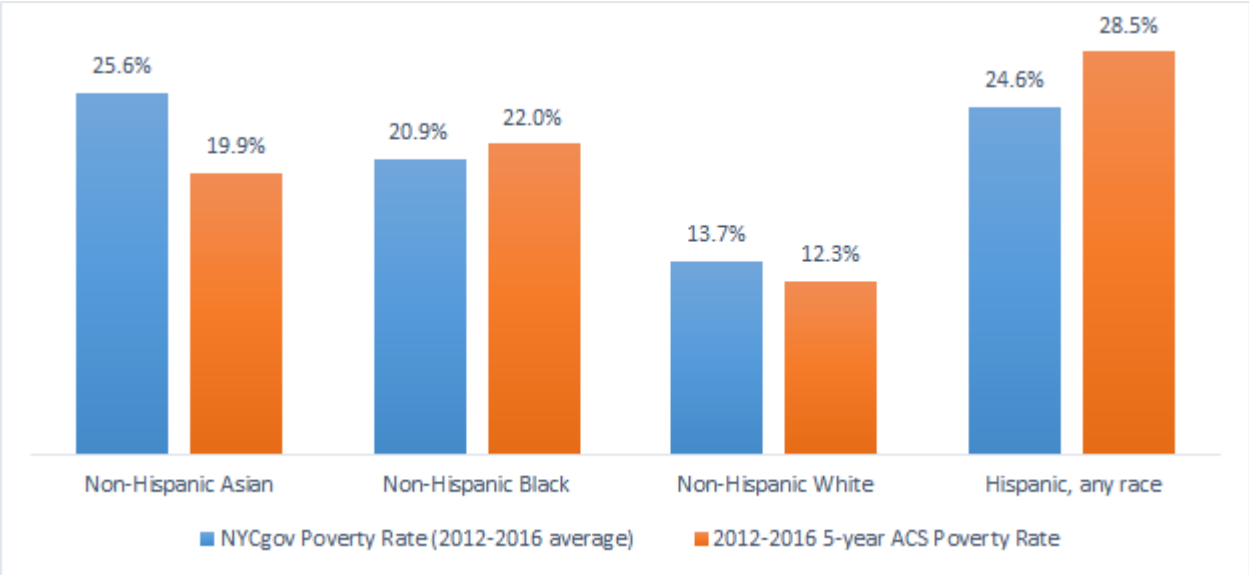
New York City: Alternative Poverty Measure

While the information from the federal level provides a snapshot of poverty around the country, the measure does not take into account regional variations in cost of living and the impact of benefits and costs of working. The Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity has developed an alternative poverty measure, adapted from research and recommendations from the National Academy of Sciences. The NYC Government (NYCgov) Poverty Measure differs with the official federal measure by taking into account the high cost of housing in New York City. The measure also makes adjustments based on factors that help alleviate poverty including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, or commonly known as food stamps), housing assistance, or other earned income tax credits. The measure also adds in what are deemed essential costs such as childcare, commuting, and medical costs. Overall, this results in different thresholds of poverty as well as differing rates of poverty. Full details are available at: http://www1.nyc.gov/site/opportunity/poverty-in-nyc/poverty-measure.page

A comparison between the NYCgov poverty measure and the federal poverty measure showed a large difference for the Asian community in New York City. To roughly compare the two measures, the average NYCgov poverty rate calculated for Asians from 2012 to 2016 was 25.6 percent, compared to a poverty rate of 19.9 percent from the 2012-2016 five-year ACS estimate (Figure 6). One of the reasons the City cites as a reason for this gap is that one in three Asians in the workforce were not yet citizens and thus not able to access many benefits of the social safety net. Accordingly, higher portions of the Asian community were in poverty under the NYCgov poverty measure than under the federal poverty measure.

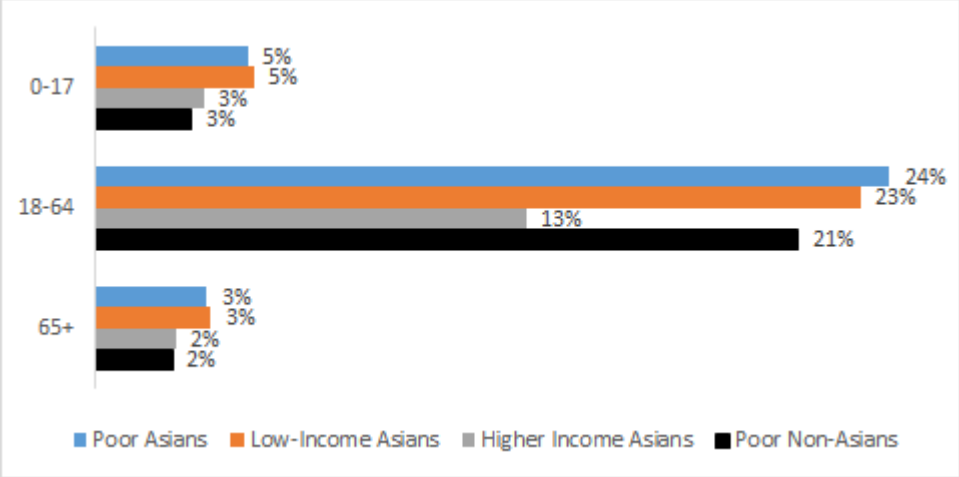
While the rest of the report will focus on the federal poverty measure as it is the measure used in the ACS data, it is important to keep in mind the gap in poverty-alleviating resources that the Asian community is able to access.

Figure 6: Comparison of NYCgov and Federal Poverty Measures by Major Race



New York City: Living Expenses

Figure 7: Uninsured Rates for Health Insurance for Poor and Low-Income Individuals for Asians and Non-Asians



The high cost of living in New York City contributed to the burdens placed on the working poor in New York City. This section will examine living expenses from housing and health insurance perspectives.

While the Affordable Care Act had an impact on the uninsured rates among Asians in New York City, peaking in 2010 at 17.8 percent and dropping to a low of 8.7 percent in 2016, poor and low-income Asian New Yorkers continued to face challenges in obtaining health insurance.[2] Both poor and low-income Asian New Yorkers were more likely to be uninsured than poor non-Asian New Yorkers, for all age groups (Figure 7). Uninsured rates were particularly high for poor and low-income working-age adults in the Asian community, with almost one in four uninsured.

Housing cost burdens were also immense on poor and low-income households.[3] The vast majority of poor and low-income households had to devote more than 30 percent of their household income on housing costs, with similar percentages of Asian and non-Asian household living with burdensome housing costs (Figure 8).

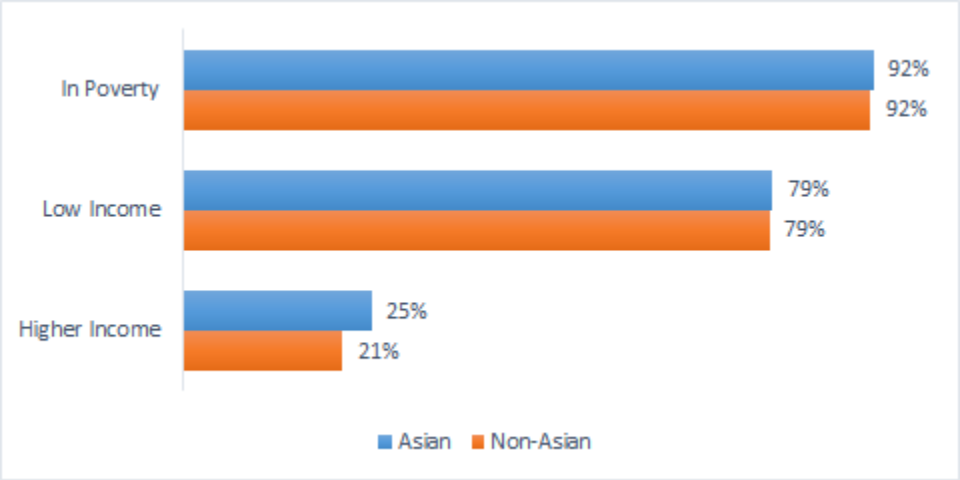


Figure 8: Percent of Households by Income Levels Paying More than 30 Percent of Household Income on Housing Costs for Asians and Non-Asians

[2] A family is defined here as low-income using the same income thresholds as the federal poverty guidelines, except each threshold is multiplied by two. For example, the federal poverty threshold for a family of two adults and two children was $24,339 in 2016. Therefore, a family of two adults and two children with a total family income of anywhere from $24,339 up to but below $48,678 would be considered low-income.

[3] By federal standards, spending 30 percent or more of household income on housing costs is considered to be a housing cost burden. https://www.census.gov/housing/census/publications/who-can-afford.pdf

New York City: Immigrants

Immigrants formed the vast majority (68 percent) of the Asian community in New York City. Poverty rates by citizenship and nativity showed that Asians who were not yet citizens had the highest poverty rates (Figure 9). Native-born Asian New Yorkers had higher poverty rates than naturalized Asians. This is not surprising because 52 percent of all native-born Asian New Yorkers were children (less than 18 years of age), and 47 percent of Asian children had at least one non-citizen parent.

Asian immigrants tended to be more recent arrivals; one in four Asian immigrants having arrived less than 10 years ago, compared with 18 percent of non-Asian immigrants. Coupled with the much higher poverty rates for recent Asian immigrants (Figure 10), the result is Asian immigrants, both citizens and non-citizens, had higher poverty rates compared to their non-Asian counterparts.

Asian immigrants living in poverty were challenged by language and educational barriers. Of those in poverty, 70 percent of Asian immigrants and 59 percent of non-Asian immigrants had limited English proficiency (LEP). Similarly, Asian immigrants were more likely to be living in a household without anyone age 14 or older who is English proficient, with 51 percent of Asian immigrants and 38 percent of non-Asian immigrants in those living situations. Without an adult with strong English skills, navigating the education system, finding quality job opportunities, and dealing with government institutions becomes a major challenge for Asian immigrant families in need.

Asian immigrants had higher poverty rates than non-Asian immigrants.

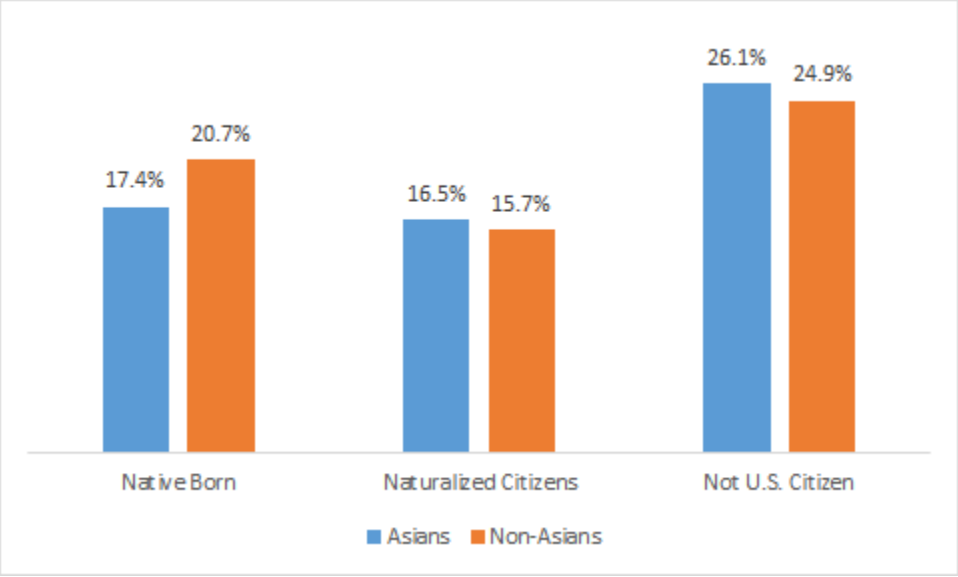
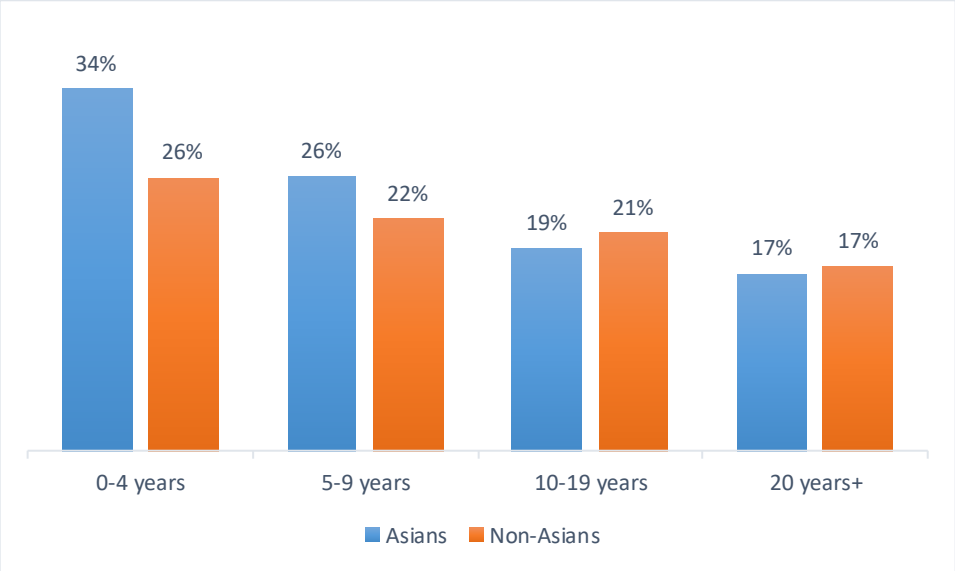


Figure 9: Poverty Rates for Asian and Non-Asian Immigrants by Nativity and Citizenship

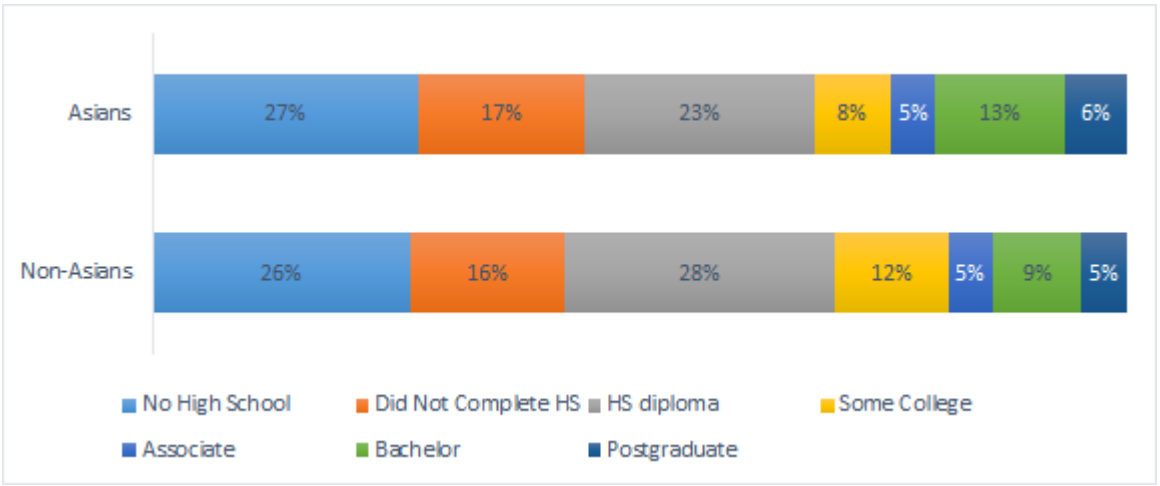
Figure 10: Poverty Rates for Asian and Non-Asian Immigrants in New York City by Number of Years in the United States



Adult Asian immigrants in poverty were less likely to have a high school diploma.

Asian immigrants in poverty also faced two different barriers related to education. First, many Asian adult immigrants (age 25 and older to limit the analysis to adults who have likely completed their education) arrived in this country with little education (Figure 11). In fact, slightly higher percentage of Asian adult immigrants in poverty did not complete high school compared to non-Asian immigrants in poverty. However, a second educational barrier that Asian immigrants faced was the inability to transfer professional credentials. Almost one in five Asian adult immigrants living in poverty had completed a bachelor's degree or higher.

Figure 11: Educational Attainment Among Adults Age 25 years or Older Living in Poverty for Asians and Non-Asians



New York City: Children

In New York City, Asian child poverty rates were lower than that of Black and Hispanic children, but much higher than that of non-Hispanic White children. Asian child poverty rates also increased from 2000 to 2016 by 1.4 percentage points, while Black child poverty rates and Hispanic child poverty rates were down by more than 1 percentage point each and non-Hispanic White children increased by 2.3 percentage points (Figure 12).

Asian children living in poverty were more likely to be living in two-parent households than non-Asian children in poverty (Figure 13). More than three in four Asian children in poor households were living with two parents, compared to only one in three non-Asian children in poor households. For single-parent households, Asian and non-Asian children were similarly more likely to be living in single-mother households than single-father ones.

Asian children living in poverty were also much more likely to be part of immigrant households. While only 51 percent of non-Asian children in poverty were living with at least one immigrant parent, 96 percent of Asian children in poverty were living with at least one immigrant parent. Only 86 percent of Asian children who were living well above the poverty level (at least twice the poverty threshold) had at least one immigrant parent.

96 percent of Asian children in poverty had at least one immigrant parent.

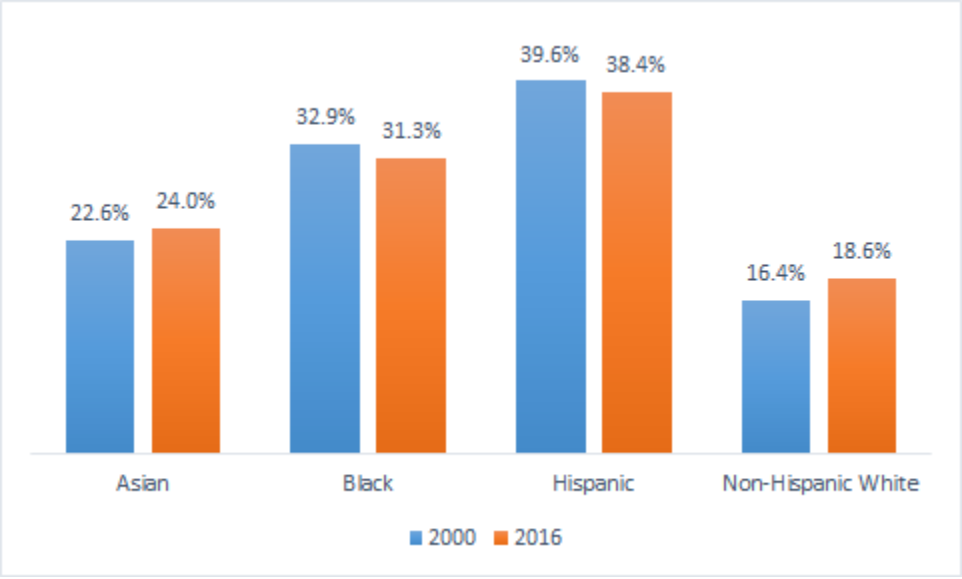
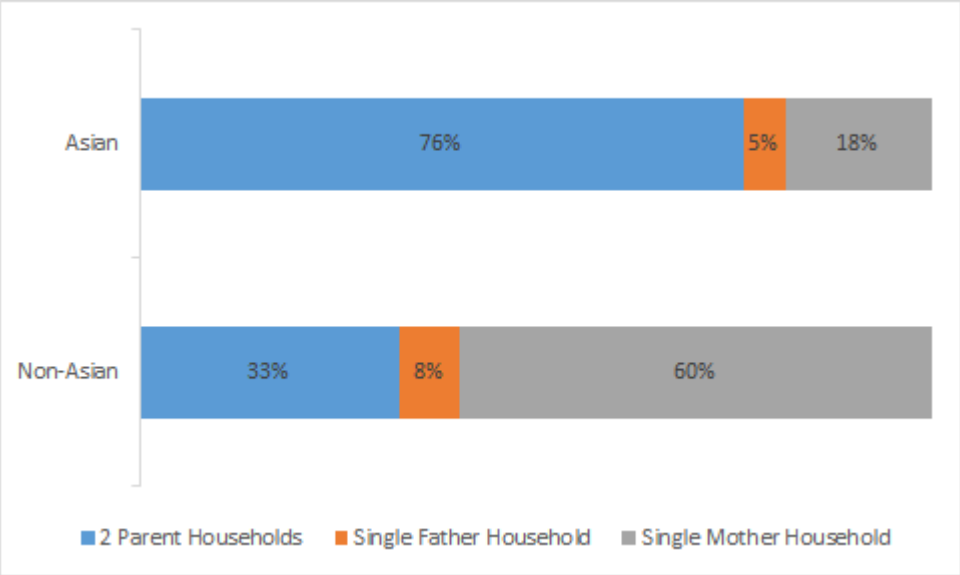


Figure 12: Child Poverty Rates in New York City by Major Race and Ethnicity

Figure 13: Living Arrangements of Children in Poverty for Asians and Non-Asians



Asian children in poverty were also more likely to be part of poor working families. Among children in households, 86 percent of children had one or more parents in the workforce, compared with 68 percent of non-Asian children. Asian children in poverty were also more likely to be in households with 2 or more workers in the household, with 28 percent of poor Asian children in multiple worker households compared to 17 percent of poor non-Asian children (Figure 14).

Linguistic isolation was also more common among Asian children living in poverty. Defining linguistic isolation as households without someone 14 years or older who speaks English very well, 43 percent of Asian children in poverty lived in a linguistically isolated household, compared to 19 percent of non-Asian children in poverty and 27 percent of Hispanic children in poverty.

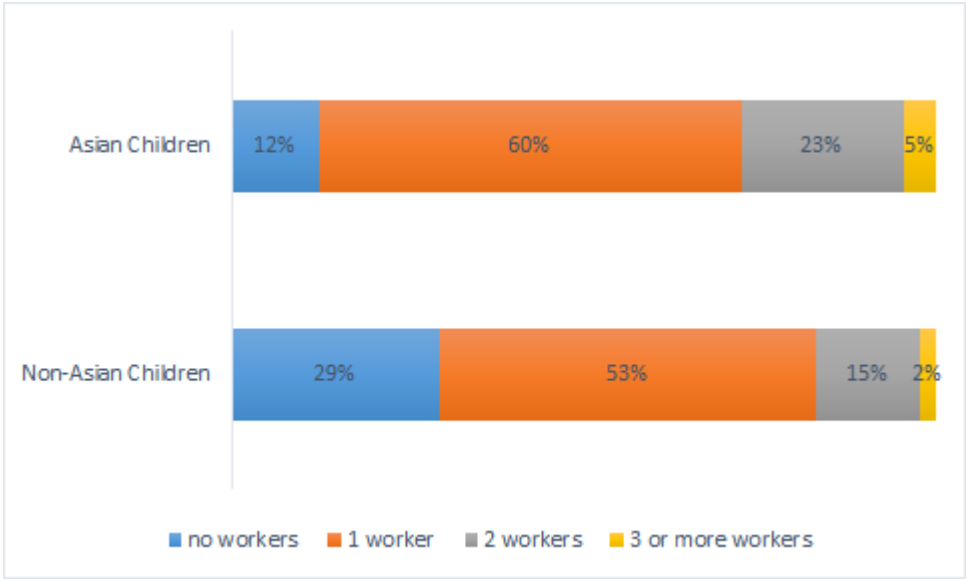


Figure 14: Percent of Children in Poverty by Number of Workers per Households for Asians and Non-Asians

New York City: Seniors

Almost one in four Asian seniors in New York City lived in poverty. Asian senior poverty rate increased by 1.3 percentage points from 2000 to 2016 (Figure 15). This was in contrast to falling poverty rates among Black and Hispanic seniors, and a 0.9 percentage point increase among non-Hispanic White seniors. Asian seniors had higher poverty rates than Black and non-Hispanic White seniors.

Almost all of the Asian senior population in New York City (96 percent) was immigrant, so not surprisingly almost all Asian seniors living in poverty were also immigrant. Asian seniors living in poverty were less likely to be naturalized citizens, with 66 percent of Asian seniors living in poverty holding citizenship (Figure 16), compared with 71 percent of Asian seniors living at or above the poverty threshold.

Asian seniors in New York City were also more likely to be recent arrivals. About 10 percent of Asian immigrant seniors living in poverty arrived in the United States less than 10 years ago. By contrast, just over 8 percent of Asian immigrant seniors living at or above the poverty threshold and over 4 percent of non-Asian immigrant seniors living in poverty had arrived in the same time frame.

As a result of the high percentage of immigrants among Asian seniors, LEP rates among Asian seniors were also high, particularly for those living in poverty.

Asian seniors had the largest percentage point increase in poverty rates among all races.

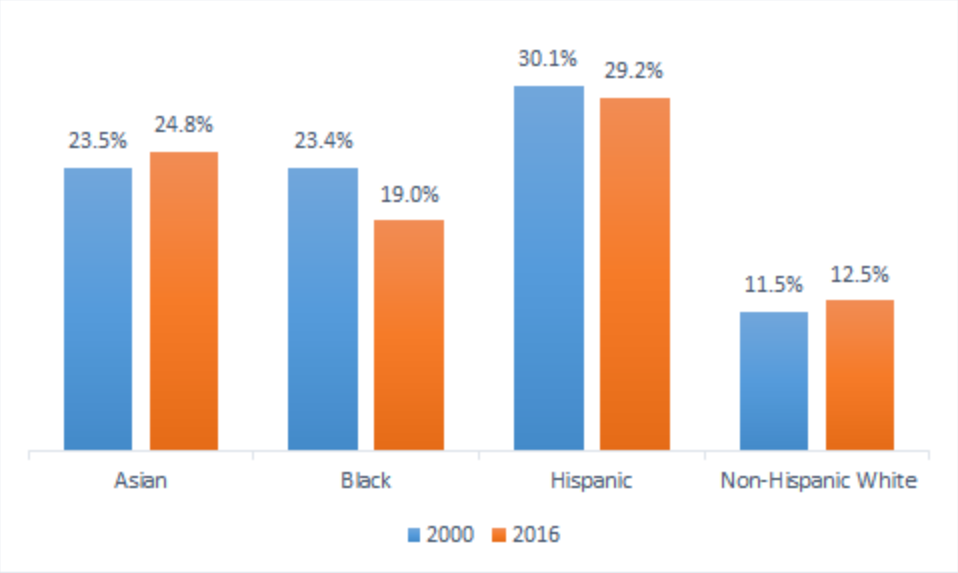
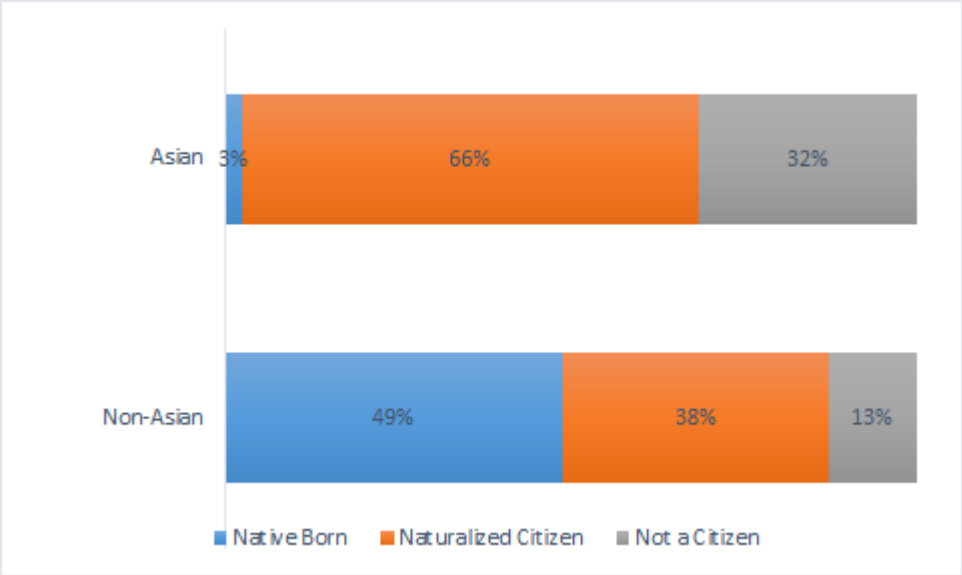


Figure 15: Poverty Rates for Seniors by Major Race and Ethnicity

Figure 16: Citizenship and Nativity for Seniors Living in Poverty for Asians and Non-Asians



For seniors living in poverty, LEP rates were 83 percent for Asians and only 24 percent for non-Asians. For Asian seniors living at or above the poverty threshold, the LEP rate was lower at 69 percent.

Linguistic isolation was a challenge for Asian seniors living in poverty. For seniors living in poverty, 69 percent of Asians and 39 percent of non-Asians were living in a household where no one age 14 or older spoke English very well. By contrast, only 38 percent of Asian seniors living at or above the poverty threshold were linguistically isolated.

Asian seniors were less likely than non-Asian seniors to be living alone (Figure 17). Two out of three Asian seniors living in poverty resided with family, compared with two out of five non-Asian seniors. However, almost nine in 10 Asian seniors living at or above the poverty threshold lived with family.

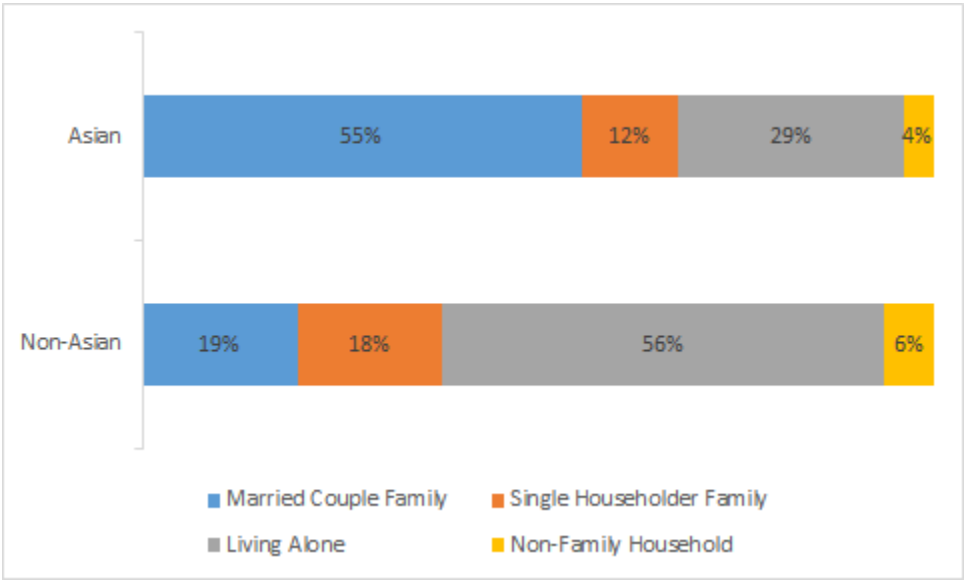


Figure 17: Living Arrangements for Seniors Living in Poverty for Asians and Non-Asians

New York City: Working-Age Adults

Working-age Asian adults had higher poverty rates than their Black and non-Hispanic White counterparts (Figure 18). English proficiency had a significant impact on improving the poverty status of workers. For Asian workers living in poverty, 63 percent have LEP, while for Asian workers living at or above the poverty threshold, only 40 percent have LEP. Similar improvements can be seen among non-Asians, as 31 percent of non-Asian workers living in poverty have LEP compared to only 17 percent of non-Asian workers living at or above the poverty threshold.

Working-age Asian New Yorkers in poverty were about as likely to be in the labor force compared with non-Asians, with 48 percent of Asians in poverty in the labor force, compared with 46 percent of non-Asians in poverty. The major difference lies in the unemployment rates for those groups, where 18.7 percent of Asians in the labor force and 29.1 percent of non-Asians in the labor force were unemployed.

While most of the top occupations and industries that employed those living in poverty were similar for both Asians and non-Asians, a handful of occupations and industries were unique to Asian workers living in poverty. Among the most common occupational categories for poor Asian workers, five were unique to Asian workers: chefs and head cooks, miscellaneous personal appearance workers, food preparation workers, sewing machine operators, and driver/sales workers and truck drivers (Table 1). Two of these categories covered jobs that have recently been in the news. The category of "miscellaneous personal appearance workers" includes the large number of Asians employed as the nail salon workers. The category of "driver/sales workers and truck drivers" represents the large number of Asians in food delivery work.

From an industry perspective, four of the top fifteen industries that employed Asians living in poverty were unique: cut and sew apparel manufacturing; nail salons and other personal care services; beauty salons; and securities, commodities, funds, trusts, and other financial investments (Table 2). The restaurant and food service industry was a vital source of employment for Asian workers living in poverty, employing 21 percent of those workers. Among non-Asian workers living in poverty, only 10 percent were employed in the restaurant and food service industry.

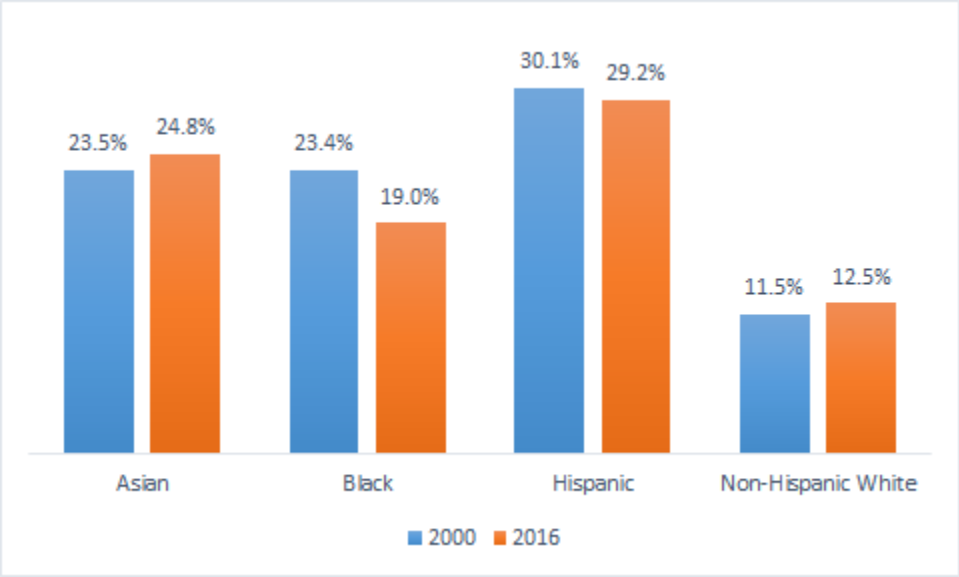


Figure 18: Poverty Rates for Working-Age Adults by Race and Ethnicity

New York City: Working-Age Adults

Table 1: Top 15 Occupational Categories for Asian Workers Living in Poverty

Occupational Category	% of Asian workers in poverty
Cashiers	7.0
Waiters and waitresses	5.1
Chefs and head cooks	***4.4***
Miscellaneous personal appearance workers	***3.7***
Taxi drivers and chauffeurs	3.5
Retail salespersons	3.4
Nursing, psychiatric, and home health aides	2.9
Construction laborers	2.4
Cooks	2.2
Food preparation workers	***2.2***
Sewing machine operators	***2.0***
Childcare workers	1.7
Driver/sales workers and truck drivers	***1.7***
Personal care aides	1.7
Janitors and building cleaners	1.5

Table 2: Top 15 Industry Categories for Asian Workers Living in Poverty

Industry Category	% of Asian Workers in Poverty
Restaurants and other food services	20.7
Construction	5.4
Colleges, universities, and professional schools, including junior colleges	3.8
Taxi and limousine service	3.5
Grocery stores	3.0
Cut and sew apparel manufacturing	***2.9***
Nail salons and other personal care services	***2.5***
Beauty salons	***2.4***
Home health care services	2.1
Individual and family services	2.0
Clothing stores	1.7
Private households	1.5
Elementary and secondary schools	1.5
Child day care services	1.5
Securities, commodities, funds, trusts, and other financial investments	***1.4***

Bold Italic categories are in the Top 15 categories for Asian workers only.

Recommendations

To reduce poverty among Asian New Yorkers requires addressing the limited economic opportunity among low-wage immigrant workers. Asian workers in poverty were limited by either low educational attainment or the inability to transfer professional and degree credentials to the American job market. English language skills also were a key barrier to economic opportunity. Therefore we recommend:

- Focusing workforce development programs on adult language learners to develop relevant workplace English skills;
- Creating opportunities for workers without educational credentials to learn new skills through workforce development bridge programs, for example;
- Developing pathways to adapt professional credentials of immigrant workers from their home country to the American workforce.

As seen from our previous report, *NYC'S Economic Engine: Contributions & Challenges of Asian Small Businesses (2016)*, Asian-owned businesses in New York City generated more than half of net new jobs from 2002 to 2012. **The city must work with Asian-owned businesses to ensure that they are able to both continue to expand and also create jobs that meet the wage and safety standards as required.** As such we recommend:

- Developing or expanding in-language outreach and training programs on the wage and labor protection standards through partnering with community-based organizations, workers, and business owners to inform them why and how to comply;
- Creating in-language outreach programs that work with Asian-owned businesses where they are located to help them access resources to expand their businesses.

This report shows that language access remains a key need in the Asian community. Programs and benefits aimed at alleviating poverty need to be delivered in-language. NYC's new language access law passed in 2017 (Local Law 30) is an important step in increasing access to services. Implementation of the law will be key to its success, which should include working with key community stakeholders who offer and understand the need for in-language social services.

Education is the key pathway out of poverty for almost all Asian immigrant families. Ensuring that Asian families have awareness about and access to all the available educational opportunities will require that the Department of Education develop a comprehensive in-language outreach program particularly for poor and low-income Asian families. Parents and children will need a seat at the table in determining how their families will be impacted by major educational policy changes.

Recommendations

Access to affordable healthcare remains a challenge for poor Asian communities. The Affordable Care Act Navigator program has been a tremendous help in getting Asian New Yorkers to understand and sign up for available health insurance options. We recommend that the State continue to fund this vital program.

While Asian seniors were less likely than non-Asian seniors to be living alone, language and cultural barriers and a high poverty rate point to great need for services among Asian seniors. As the Asian senior population continues to rapidly grow, community-based organizations that serve them will be increasingly stretched thin. Current contracting policies for senior services that favor large city-wide contracts put neighborhood-based Asian-serving organizations at a disadvantage. Often these organizations must subcontract with a larger main contractor and end up the first to be cut during budget cuts and the last to receive budget increases. We therefore recommend:

- The City **help smaller community-based nonprofits better compete for city contracts** by either setting aside parts of the social services budget for smaller contracts which community-based organizations can better compete for or recognizing in the proposal evaluation process the value of language and cultural competency and established presence in immigrant neighborhoods;
- **Building contract protections for social service subcontractors** to prevent complete loss of funding when contracts are cut during tight budget eras;
- **Tackling the lack of access by some Asian seniors to the Social Security safety net** by increasing access and awareness of employment opportunities to help healthy seniors build work experience and increase access to Social Security. For example, the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) provides subsidized, part-time community service employment for low-income adults age 55 or older who have poor employment prospects. Many seniors who take part in this program were able to use the skills they learned to find more permanent work.

Appendix

Table A: Statewide Asian Ethnic Population for 2000 and 2016

	Population Estimate for 2016				Population Change from 2000 to 2016			
	New York State	New York City	Suburbs of NYC	Upstate New York	New York State	New York City	Suburbs of NYC	Upstate New York
Bangladeshi	76,642	69,042	4,588	3,012	227%	211%	390%	827%
Cambodian	6,953	3,639	1,033	2,281	117%	90%	207%	142%
Chinese, except Taiwanese	707,531	579,369	78,187	49,975	67%	60%	97%	122%
Filipino	140,464	86,581	37,323	16,560	68%	54%	72%	188%
Indian	397,967	246,092	105,783	46,092	53%	38%	77%	105%
Indonesian	6,002	3,990	764	1,248	92%	65%	161%	206%
Japanese	55,588	34,854	12,655	8,079	45%	50%	18%	88%
Korean	145,677	95,945	30,882	18,850	20%	10%	49%	44%
Laotian	4,169	607	378	3,184	30%	141%	136%	14%
Malaysian	4,610	3,632	396	582	100%	83%	196%	220%
Pakistani	83,738	54,979	20,646	8,113	135%	108%	209%	221%
Sri Lankan	7,026	5,071	1,161	794	142%	129%	200%	154%
Taiwanese	16,590	11,475	2,681	2,434	107%	134%	60%	72%
Thai	14,151	7,938	2,465	3,748	102%	81%	55%	266%
Vietnamese	37,158	18,122	6,524	12,512	47%	47%	100%	29%
Other Asian (2000 Category)	32,601	13,892	2,115	16,594	757%	398%	457%	2509%
Bhutanese	*2,443*	*401*	*15*	*2,027*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Burmese	*16,569*	*5,052*	*1,052*	*10,465*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Nepalese	*11,975*	*7,310*	*880*	*3,785*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Remaining Asian Groups	*1,614*	*1,129*	*168*	*317*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Other Asian, not specified	63,760	42,241	12,209	9,310	309%	295%	410%	273%
Arab	142,546	83,399	26,260	32,887	29%	34%	29%	19%

Note: Bhutanese, Burmese, and Nepalese were not reported separately for the 2000 Census. Residents identifying as one of those three Asian groups were tallied in the "Other Asian" category. Subsequent population growth enable those three ethnicities to exceed the Census Bureau's population reporting thresholds. From the 2010 Census onwards, the Census Bureau reports those groups separate from the "Other Asian" category.

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