

JULY 2021

VOICES REPORT

HEARING FROM THE
API MIDDLE TN COMMUNITY

02



INTRODUCTION

Following the violent shootings in Atlanta on March 16 in which 6 of the 8 people murdered were women of Asian descent, API Middle Tennessee hosted two Processing Sessions dedicated to Asians and Pacific Islanders. It was clear from both sessions that so many of us are feeling pain, tenderness, anger, regret and a host of other emotions, sometimes all at the same time. As part of our ongoing processing, and to help non-AAPI allies understand some of what the AAPI community might be going through in this time of continued hatred against AAPI, we invited those that identify as Asian, Asian-American, and Pacific Islander to fill out an anonymous survey. The responses and findings from those who gave us permission to share are in this report. Our hope with sharing these responses is to open up lines of communication, as well as provide information to allies on what they can do to support AAPI community members.

“ I SAT IN MY CAR CRYING WHEN I FOUND OUT THE NEWS. IT BROUGHT TO THE SURFACE DEEPLY BURIED TRAUMA FROM PAST EXPERIENCES OF RACISM AND JUST ONGOING GRIEF WITHIN THE COMMUNITY.

03

SUMMARY

The staggering racist acts over the last 18 months have brought to the surface the realization for many of our community that anti-AAPI racism and violence is not new and that we are often seen as outsiders, perpetual foreigners. Feelings of loneliness, anger, fear, grief and also responsibility have arisen, as have memories of past racial trauma that had been buried, especially living in the South.

There is anger around the lack of importance, complacency, airtime and even gaslighting in the white dominant culture, and the repeated theme of AAPI invisibility. There is regret that it took a violent event like the Atlanta shootings to mobilize so many of the AAPI community around racial justice.

The survey asked how supported folks feel in their various communities and what more those communities can do. In general, people feel the most supported in their family communities and least supported in their work communities. Interestingly, the level of support felt in religious/spiritual communities is split right down the middle. Within work communities, community members wanted their non-AAPI colleagues to educate themselves on AAPI history and culture, and to stand up to both blatant and subtle racism in the form of jokes and microaggressions, acknowledging that they have a responsibility to root out white supremacist systems they're a part of and not just put it on the shoulders of BIPOC to fix.

Overall there was a strong desire to send care and protection to marginalized communities, both AAPI and non-AAPI, especially elders and future generations.

COLLECTIVE ANGER

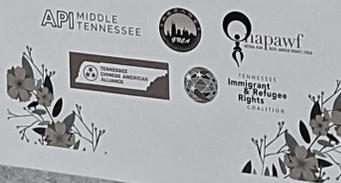
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I ebb in and out of anger and sadness. Angry that so many white people are complacent or apathetic and outside of “thoughts and prayers” haven’t gone out of their way to sit with us in our grieving or honoring our hurt and murdered loved ones. Their whole routine isn’t uprooted to the core. I’m angry because the US is spinning their wheels in refusing to enact policy and change towards racism. I’m angry because the Black and AAPI communities are demonstrating our collective anger and grief, and it keeps bumping up against this wall of resistance. We are exhausted.

”



**PROTECT
ASIAN
LIVES!**



The community expressed anger over the complacency of white people and the lack of response from community leaders when it comes to Asian hate. This frustration was tied to the community and its issues being made invisible.

Some community members also brought up microaggressions. One member noted that these issues were minimized and another noted that some thought the issues our community faces aren't real.

“I’m angry about how easily white people can shrug off and forget these issues. I’m angry that white comfort is privileged over AAPI survival.”

05

REGRET, LOSS, & CONFLICT

I wish I had found AAPI community growing up. I'm a Filipina adoptee and it was very isolating to be in a small rural hometown where there were no racial mirrors.

Respondents noted some regret about not having taken on a more intentional effort to connect with their AAPI identity. There was also a sense of loss, with one respondent expressing sadness over the fact that it took a tragedy like the Atlanta shootings for people to recognizing Anti-Asian sentiment in the American South.

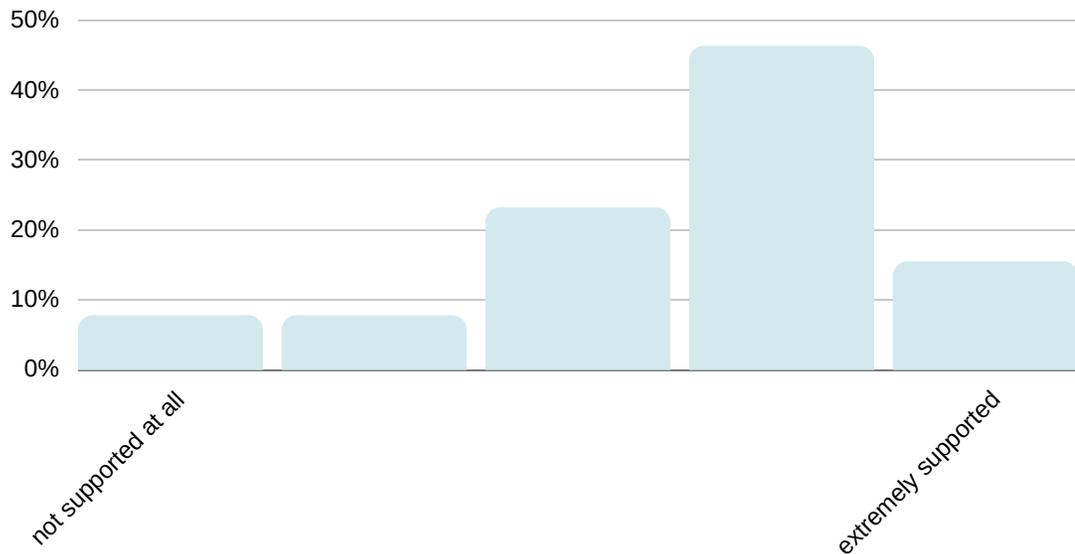
Responses also reflected a division across generational lines within the AAPI community. Some noted the differences in the ways that their parents and grandparents felt about things like assimilation, cultural identity, and the "model minority" myth. A sense of loss and frustration was also expressed over the erasure of individual ethnic identities under the umbrella of Asian or Asian American umbrella.

"I wish my family knew how harmful the color blind rhetoric we were taught in the 90's was so harmful. I was told that I was American and to be proud and grateful. I just wanted to be seen."

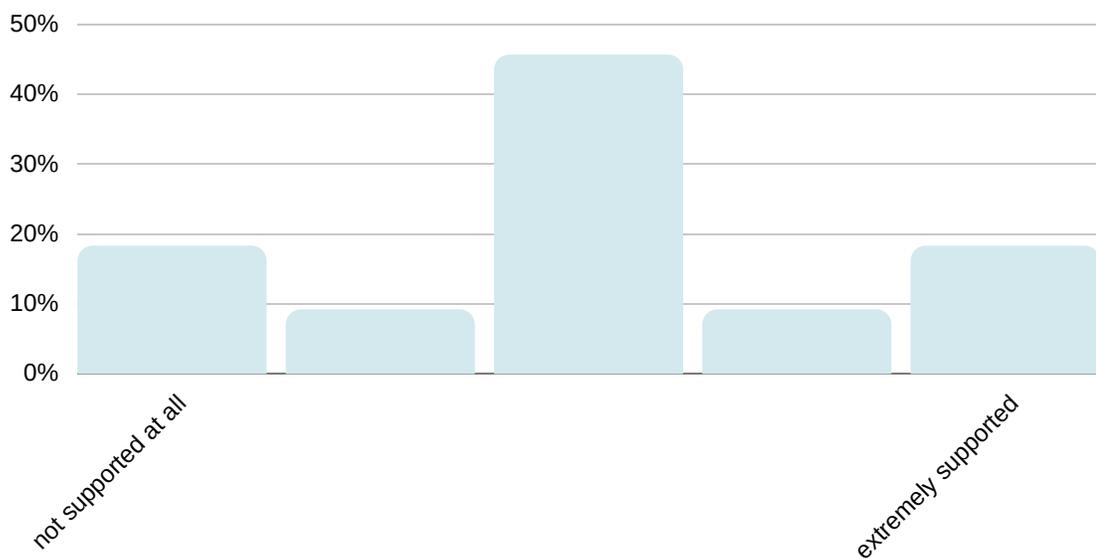
06

SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

HOW SUPPORTED DO YOU FEEL IN YOUR FAMILY WHEN IT COMES TO RACE AND ANTI-AAPI SENTIMENT?



HOW SUPPORTED DO YOU FEEL IN YOUR RELIGIOUS/SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY WHEN IT COMES TO RACE AND ANTI-AAPI SENTIMENT?

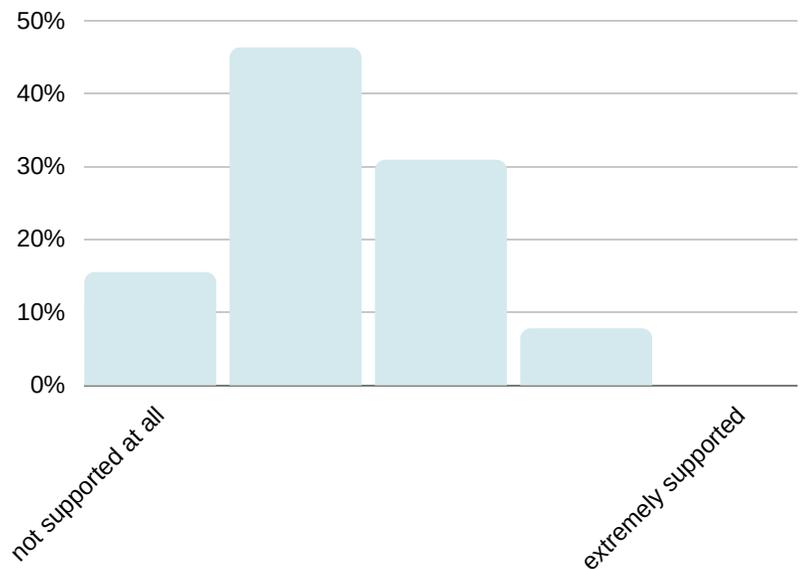


07

NEED FOR MORE API SUPPORT IN WORK PLACES

“JUST BECAUSE I MAY KNOW HOW TO MOVE IN WHITE (-DOMINANT) SPACES, DOESN'T MEAN I AM ACCEPTED AND WELCOMED.”

HOW SUPPORTED DO YOU FEEL IN YOUR WORK COMMUNITY WHEN IT COMES TO RACE AND ANTI-AAPI SENTIMENT?



Though some responses alluded to challenges between generations, most respondents did feel supported in their families. There were mixed responses with how people felt supported in their spiritual or religious communities, but this is likely due to different religious traditions and the division of religious communities along racial lines. API Middle Tennessee community members felt the least affirmed and welcomed in their in the workplace with over 60% of respondents feeling less supported or not supported at all. One respondent noted "how painful it is when they [non-AAPI] are silent."

“ALL LEADERSHIP AT MY NASHVILLE OFFICE IS WHITE MEN. THIS IS NOT A SAFE PLACE TO BRING UP RACIST OR SEXIST HARASSMENT. ALL OF IT HAS GOTTEN DISMISSED AS BEING “OVER REACTION” OF THE VICTIM.”

08

WHAT WORKPLACES CAN DO FOR THE API COMMUNITY

SOME SUGGESTIONS FROM THE COMMUNITY:

- Recognize the lack of professional advancement of AAPI and other POC employees and do something about to diversify leadership
- Take responsibility for educating yourselves and white colleagues about AAPI and BIPOC culture and histories of both discrimination and contribution by reading, watching and listening without commentary
- Provide spaces and ways for white colleagues to learn about their own race and white privilege
- Sponsor and require company events and trainings in relation to education and cultural awareness
- Normalize difficult conversations relating to internal bias and factors that have contributed to the current political climate
- Recognize our suffering as real, including when it relates to microaggressions where impact may not reflect original intent but is nonetheless extremely impactful
- Integrate language about race and other marginalized communities into your workflows and KPIs



09

LOVE

**THE SURVEY ASKED PARTICIPANTS,
"WHO DO YOU WANT TO SEND LOVE TO?"**

- Other multiethnic folk who have yet to find a space where they feel worthy or welcomed to share their experiences right now.
- All AAPIs around the country and the Asian diaspora around the world
- To every single person who came to this country and are brilliant and bright but shamed or ignored because they can't speak English
- To every advocate and civil rights activist who won't back down
- The API Middle TN community
- The API artists and writers who are cataloging in their work, this movement of resistance to white supremacy terror
- Asian women who have to deal with so much shit all the time
- The fellow AAPI community
- Everyone
- AAPI folks who are not ready to speak out yet and are hurting alone in silence
- My Asian elders who are afraid
- My young nieces who I don't want to be afraid when they grow up
- My mom

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