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New York's Asian-Pacific origin students regularly harassed

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New York, May 24 (IANS) Nearly 85,000 high school students of Asian-Pacific origin in New York regularly face race-based harassment and the affect of this on their mental health is often overlooked due to the common belief that the community is a model minority group, a survey has found.

The survey of American students of Asian-Pacific origin was conducted in 12 public schools across New York. It was designed by the Asian American Student Advocacy Project (ASAP), a youth leadership project of the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF).

More than half of the 260 students who participated in the survey reported being verbally harassed at school or during their commute to school, 69 percent witnessed harassment at their school, and almost 80 percent thought that race is a factor in harassment.

The findings of the survey and recommendations on reducing harassment and addressing mental health issues in schools were released at a community briefing Friday by the CACF, a pan-Asian children's advocacy organisation that aims to improve the health and well-being of Asian American children and families in New York.

The survey said the New York City Council's Dignity in All Schools Act on preventing bias-based harassment has not been implemented by Mayor Michael Bloomberg's administration and the department of education.

The survey report said "students continue to be threatened with mental, emotional, and physical harm", making it difficult for them to learn and grow in an environment that is not safe and supportive.

The CACF has also challenged the popular view that the Asian-Pacific American community - consisting of South Asians, East Asians, Southeast Asians and Pacific islanders - is an overachieving community. They are the fastest growing community in the city, constituting 12 percent of the city's population, but many of them are immigrants struggling with poverty and limited English skills.

Students of Asia-Pacific origin make up over 13 percent of the city's 1.1 million students. But one in five students learning English is an Asian, one in four Asian-Pacific American students lives below the poverty line, and one in four does not graduate from high school on time or at all.

To reduce harassment in schools, ASAP has recommended mandatory staff training by the education department. This would equip them to address harassment and build a school culture of tolerance, acceptance, and respect for all.

ASAP has also recommended conducting workshops for students on harassment prevention and awareness, and establishing clear and defined procedures in schools for responding to harassment.

The student body found that the mental health concerns of Asian-Pacific American students are often overlooked because of the stereotypical image that they are overachievers.

Confirming that they face barriers to access mental health services, ASAP said they need accessible, approachable, culturally competent and linguistically appropriate services in their schools.

Among ASAP's recommendations are increasing mental health awareness among school staff and students, increasing availability of brochures on mental health services in schools, adding mental health education to the curriculum and building more school-based health clinics within each of the five city boroughs.

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46 kg/ 162 cm
Guangdong

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