Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 and Anti-Asian Hate Violence in Montgomery County, MD

Our learnings from Community Conversations
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Content Warning for this report:
Mentions of Anti-Asian Violence, Xenophobia, State Violence, Medical Neglect, Death
Dear friends and comrades,

Since 1996, the Asian/Pacific Islander Domestic Violence Resource Project (DVRP) has provided services to survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault in Washington DC, Maryland and Virginia. The needs for our services has increased exponentially since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

DVRP has seen an increase in incidents of intimate partner violence reported since the onset of the pandemic. We have also seen the increase in gendered nature of anti-Asian violence with women making up 78% of those impacted. Anti-Asian violence has existed in the U.S since its inception and is the result of white supremacy, colonialism, imperialism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, capitalism, and the many intersecting systems of oppression that continue to exploit and harm our communities that can be seen in bills and legislations seeking to treat us as “others” such as through the Japanese Internment camps, and post-9/11 "Special Registrations” targeting South Asians and Muslims.

Over the past six months, DVRP has been engaging in community conversations, in the form of listening sessions, to learn from A/PI survivors and other community members, in Montgomery County, MD, about the ways in which COVID-19 and anti-Asian hate violence has impacted them. MoCo has an A/PI population of over 15.7% and many of them responded to our request to join us to speak about their experiences of Anti-Asian violence during the pandemic.

This report is rooted in community conversations; we hope to share with you what we have learned so far. We are thankful to our funders: the Asian American Health Initiative & Primary Care Coalition for their support.

We hope you share the information from this report with your loved ones, join us in our healing programs and reach out if you or loved ones need support.

In solidarity,

Krittika Ghosh, MSc
Executive Director
This report is driven by community conversations. As you read it, we invite you to be grounded in the understanding that these community conversations are meant to sow seeds to building deeper relationships with our people. We deeply believe that our people have the power to disrupt harm beyond the carceral system; we immensely value deep relationship building with our community.

Thus, this report illustrates what we have learned from initial dialogues which we hope to use as guiding light to intentionally respond to the needs of our community and build power in our community to respond to harm.

The report consists of 3 parts:

- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic
- The impact of anti-Asian hate violence
- Resources for our community to navigate ongoing struggles
Our Work So Far

Our work so far in engaging community members in a dialogue with us have taken place in the form of the follows:

We hosted multiple live listening sessions for sixteen community members to engage in a conversation about how COVID-19 and anti-Asian hate violence has impacted them. These listening sessions also included survivor-only sessions to deeply understand the intersections of gender and power-based violence, the pandemic, and anti-Asian hate violence.

As an attempt to reach a broader audience, we shared an anonymous questionnaire to community members who weren't able to participate in the live sessions. The questionnaire gathered answers on: access to resources during the pandemic, impact of anti-Asian hate violence, understanding the landscape of resources in Montgomery County, MD, etc.
Our Learnings

The listening sessions and community questionnaire focused on the three broad categories:

- Impact of COVID-19 and anti-Asian hate violence so far
- Changes since the beginning of the pandemic
- Understanding the resources needed as we move forward

Impact of COVID-19 and Anti-Asian Hate Violence

In this section, we hope to share what we have learned from A/PI survivors and other community members:

**Overall Impact of COVID-19**

68.8% of the respondents noted that the pandemic impacted their lives immensely.

A majority of the respondents to the survey and in listening sessions noted that COVID-19 impacted their lives immensely.

Please note that this question, asked in the form of a likert scale, hopes to capture the broad scope of impact of the pandemic. More focused questions were then asked to understand what the impacts are.
Impact of COVID-19 at the beginning of the pandemic

Participants shared on Jamboard, in the chat box, and over voice how COVID-19 brought feelings of uncertainty and fear. The conversation during this listening session focused on this very theme of navigating the unknown and lack of resources while caring for loved ones, specifically their immunocompromised and elderly loved ones.

Participants in this listening session shared about the fears not only of the virus but also about the rise of anti-Asian hate violence in the community and the lack of care and support around protecting themselves and their families. The conversation focused deeply on the fears of being hurt and having to make difficult decisions to keep themselves and their loved ones safe.
Responses to our Community Questionnaire
1= Strongly Disagree; 5= Strongly Agree

Impact of Anti-Asian Hate Violence

In the conversations around anti-Asian hate violence, we wanted to give space for the fears and the emotions that our community members have. The listening sessions provided a container to explore these complex emotions in the light of ongoing violence.

68.8% of the respondents noted that pandemic increased anti-Asian hate violence

62.5% of the respondents noted that they feared for their loved ones because of anti-Asian hate violence

“At the beginning of the pandemic specifically, I had to debate whether to wear a mask or risk being assaulted everyday.” - A participant in a listening session on February 17, 2022

"We think that in Montgomery County there isn't a problem with anti-Asian violence, but that is so far from the truth. It is insidious and we need to address that." - A participant in a listening session on May 11, 2022
Impact of Anti-Asian Hate Violence (Cont.)

In our listening sessions, we invited participants to use the "emotions wheel" to name the feelings that have been coming up for them with regards to anti-Asian violence. This was done because this topic can be incredibly difficult to talk about and the wheel could provide a container for the conversations.

![Emotions Wheel Image]

From a listening session on February 24, 2022

Beyond expressing their emotions - which largely were fear, anger, sadness - our community members noted time and time again that though anti-Asian violence has increased it isn't something that is new. Participants also noted that the response that is needed is by building solidarity with Black and Brown communities and to explore anti-carceral responses to harm.

"What we need are stronger communities, not a stronger police force. We need to address violence at its root to disrupt the harm in our communities."

- A participant in a listening session on May 11, 2022
How Things Have Changed Since 2020

In what ways have things changed and/or remained the same over the pandemic?

From a listening session on February 17, 2022

In this survivor-only listening session, participants shared ways in which things have changed. They spoke heavily about the layers of trauma they are navigating with domestic violence, state violence, and the pandemic.

From a listening session on February 24, 2022

Participants continued the conversations around the myriad of ways the pandemic has changed their lives, from changes in values, to changes in the people they surround themselves with, and the feelings of isolation because of the many changes that they have experienced.
Understanding the Resources Needed

Through our conversations and community questionnaire we have learned there is a lack of understanding around the resources available for our community members. It was evident that there is a lack of understanding around what resources exist and where to get them.

Responses to our Community Questionnaire

1= Strongly Disagree; 5= Strongly Agree

73.4% of the respondents noted that didn't know what resources existed in MoCo to help them heal from COVID-19

50.1% of the respondents noted that didn't know what resources existed in MoCo to receive support if they encounter anti-Asian hate violence

"I have felt quite alone in navigating what resources exist. Also not having a car makes it hard to go to places. Being an immigrant and not knowing English too well makes it harder"

- A participant in a listening session on May 23, 2022

Participants in listening sessions noted that the only resources available to navigate anti-Asian hate violence were often police related. Participants noted that carceral responses only harmed the community more and it is imperative for us to have better community-based resources. Additionally, participants noted that if the police had to be involved, they needed better tools to navigate police interaction.
In conversations we have understood that access to food and financial assistance were highly important. Especially for survivors, financial assistance during the pandemic was precarious - we had multiple survivors note that their stimulus checks were taken by their abusers. Additionally, with domestic violence being an incredibly isolating experience, survivors felt the need for connection even more during the pandemic.

Many of our community members didn’t know where to look to understand what is available in Montgomery County. MoCo could have better dissemination of resources through flyers, social media, partnering with community organizations, etc. Furthermore, the participants felt that there needed to be a way to be more engaged with the community - through community town halls.

We invite you to think in ways your community in Montgomery County, MD could be more supportive in meeting your needs?

From a listening session on February 17, 2022

From a listening session on February 24, 2022
The following are some resources created by DVRP that can help our community members support themselves and each other, especially in the light of the rise in anti-Asian hate violence.

**Safety Planning Tool**
A toolkit for survivors and members of our community to reclaim autonomy in our ability to feel and be safe. Providers can utilize this tool to understand what safety means for survivors and themselves, while learning about ways to safety plan with survivors. It also provides non-carceral approaches and resources in navigating unsafe and potentially violent situations.

The toolkit covers the following sections:
- Defining safety
- Unpacking consent and safety planning
- Understanding safety
- Building safe cocoons
- Safety in community

Find the toolkit at: tinyurl.com/durpsafeplan

**Language Guide**
While this guide is intended for service providers and community members, including friends and family of survivors of gender-based violence; it can also be used to support individuals who have experienced harm such as anti-Asian hate violence. The guide is rooted in a trauma informed and survivor-centered. It covers:
- What is a survivor-centered approach?
- What does being trauma-informed mean?
- Utilizing trauma-informed and survivor-centered language
- Key considerations while talking to survivors

Find the guide at: tinyurl.com/durplanguage
The following are some resources that are available in Montgomery County, MD for our community members to use. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list, but just a broad landscape of spaces that can be accessed.

**Montgomery County COVID-19 Information Portal**
A one-stop website which can be used to see latest COVID-19 numbers and news, testing and vaccination information, and much more.

[www.montgomerycountymd.gov/covid19/](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/covid19/)

**Asian American Health Initiative**
Asian American Health Initiative (AAHI), part of the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, aims to improve the health and wellness of Asian American communities in Montgomery County by applying equity, community engagement, and data-driven approaches.

[aahiinfo.org](http://aahiinfo.org)

**Montgomery County COVID-19 Rent Relief Program**
The COVID-19 Rent Relief Program provides short-term rental assistance to eligible households who have experienced a financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic that has caused them to fall behind on their rent. The program is managed by the County's Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) with funding from the Department of Treasury's Emergency Rental Assistance Program.

[www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/SNHS/rent-relief.html](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/SNHS/rent-relief.html)

**Audelia Community Response Team**
Audelia Community Response Team (ACRT) is a robust mutual aid project throughout PG County and Montgomery County, MD which distributes essential resources such as pantry essentials, baby food, personal care products, etc., to marginalized community members during the COVID-19 pandemic.

[www.audeliacommunity.org/](http://www.audeliacommunity.org/)

**Rockville Rainbow Collective**
Queer long-term rockville residents & mcps alumni who want to help our queer & trans neighbors of color. They provide hot meals to queer folks in Rockville and Gaithersburg every Friday.

Acknowledgements

We would like to take a moment to thank the community members who were integral in these conversations. We deeply appreciate your vulnerability and for trusting us in being part of these conversations. We have deep gratitude for you and look forward to building with you in the future.

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