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SNAPSHOT

# A Practical Approach to Disaggregating Data on Asian Americans

## Purpose and Goals of This Work

From 2025 to 2026, NORC at the University of Chicago, in partnership with the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum and Stop AAPI Hate, led an effort to develop practical, evidence-based guidance for disaggregating data on Asian American populations. Highly aggregated data do not capture the range of experiences and well-being within the population, and some communities may be less represented in analyses. This project introduces an analytic approach to support researchers, analysts, and practitioners in examining differences in well-being across Asian American communities.

### HOW THE GUIDANCE WAS DEVELOPED

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to inform the guidance. Using the 2019–2023 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata, the team conducted quantitative analyses, including weighted descriptive statistics and latent class analysis, to identify patterns in well-being across Asian country-of-origin or ethnic subgroups on indicators of education, income, housing, and health. Complementary qualitative methods included a literature scan and thematic analysis of peer-reviewed and gray literature to assess patterns in sociocultural and historical factors across Asian subgroups. To ensure recommendations were grounded in lived experience, the team conducted a listening tour across the U.S. with Asian American community members and researchers and practitioners who work with data on Asian Americans.

Insights from all three methods, as well as key findings from the Improving Asian Classification Typologies (ImpACT) project—conducted by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research under the Data Equity Center to understand public perspectives on how Asian Americans are defined, measured, and classified in federal data standards—were triangulated to identify consistent patterns and iteratively develop and refine the proposed categorization structure. The project team collaborated with an advisory panel from the outset to help ensure the work balanced empirical evidence with community-informed perspectives.

## Guiding Principles

This work centers a practical approach to mid-level data disaggregation that balances analytic depth with real-world circumstances. Several key principles underpin its development and use:

**The disaggregation categories are intended for use with data on well-being outcomes.** No single set of categories can fully capture Asian American experiences and identities, nor is this project's approach intended to define or redefine those identities. Instead, these categories incorporate key factors that shape community well-being—particularly related to health, education, housing, and income—to support analysis of patterns and variation across Asian country-of-origin or ethnic subgroups that might otherwise be less apparent.

**This approach complements, rather than replaces, existing approaches.** Rather than offering a universal solution or substitute, this approach is designed to be used alongside existing approaches such as federal standards and reporting requirements. It offers an additional analytical lens to understand well-being outcomes.

**Our guidance centers comparability while allowing for flexibility.** While categories may be adapted to specific studies, data users should weigh the benefits of customization against potential losses in comparability.

## Mid-Level Disaggregation Categories

Our approach to mid-level disaggregation incorporates the following organizing factors linked to differences in well-being outcomes:



**Historical migration patterns.** Shared migration histories and reasons influence when Asian subgroups migrated and the conditions they faced, affecting their well-being. While there is variation within subgroups, these patterns provide context for differences in well-being.



**Average socioeconomic status (SES).** Although SES varies within Asian country and ethnic subgroups, SES indicators such as income, education, and occupation type are linked to differences in well-being across Asian subgroups.



**Geographic regional grouping.** These groupings can serve as a proxy for shared cultural and linguistic experiences and social factors that shape identity, capturing broader commonalities beyond specific country-of-origin or ethnic identities.

**Table 1. Disaggregation Categories and Their Organizing Factors**

| Categories & Subgroups[a] | Organizing Factors (for additional reference)[b] |
|---|---|
| **Bangladeshi, Kazakh, Mongolian, Nepalese, Pakistani, Uzbek** | • Overall historical reasons for migrating were for non-professional employment,[c] better economic opportunities, or family reunification and are primarily Central and South Asian<br>• Lower to medium average socioeconomic status[d] |
| **Filipino, Indonesian, Thai** | • Overall historical reasons for migrating were for non-professional employment, better economic opportunities, or family reunification and are primarily Southeast Asian<br>• Lower to medium average socioeconomic status |
| **Chinese, Japanese, Korean** | • Overall historical reasons for migrating were for non-professional employment, better economic opportunities, or family reunification and are primarily East Asian<br>• Wide range of socioeconomic status |
| **Afghan, Bhutanese, Burmese, Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, Mekong-area ethnicities (e.g., Mien), Vietnamese** | • Overall historical reason for migrating was via refugee pathways and are primarily South and Southeast Asian<br>• Lower average socioeconomic status |
| **Indian, Malaysian, Sri Lankan, Taiwanese** | • Overall historical reasons for migrating were for professional employment[e] or educational opportunities<br>• Higher average socioeconomic status |

[a] The list of Asian subgroups is not comprehensive. These categories were informed by available data in the formative research. See guidance point #2, Step 2 below on incorporating additional subgroups.

[b] This table outlines factors that can inform the classification of subgroups into categories, rather than defining specific values. Data users should set appropriate ranges or criteria to define each factor (e.g., socioeconomic status) based on their sample population and context.

[c] Non-professional employment refers to jobs that do not require a four-year degree, though they may still require training or experience.

[d] Key indicators of socioeconomic status include income, employment and occupation, and educational attainment.

[e] Professional employment refers to jobs that generally require a bachelor's degree or higher.

## Disaggregation Guidance: An Overview

This guidance is intended to support a more nuanced understanding of the Asian American communities represented in a dataset. **The following is a summary of key points for quick reference; please see the full report for more detailed guidance.**

1) **Disaggregate to the most detailed level possible.** Ideally, analyze data by each specific country-of-origin or ethnic subgroup. If sufficient data are available, it is helpful to further disaggregate within each Asian subgroup by income, immigrant generational status, and English language proficiency. Our research found that these factors strongly influence the well-being of Asian Americans, broadly, and vary widely within specific Asian country or ethnic subgroups.

**2) For mid-level disaggregation of well-being data, consider using this project's categories.** When it is not feasible to disaggregate data by individual Asian country or ethnic subgroup due to sample size, confidentiality concerns, or resource limitations, a mid-level approach can provide a practical alternative. Users should first assess the size and composition of their dataset's Asian American population, then follow these steps.

**STEP 1:** **Combine data** for individual Asian country/ethnic subgroups into the categories in Table 1.

**STEP 2:** **Categorize** Asian country/ethnic subgroups not listed in Table 1 according to the organizing factors, informed by external literature or community input when needed.

**STEP 3:** **Conduct and report on analyses** for each category, explaining how categories were constructed for each analysis. Presenting findings at both the overall Asian American level and mid-level categories can offer broader context and more detailed insight.

**STEP 4:** **Further disaggregate** each category when possible. As additional analyses, consider disaggregating by income, immigrant generation, and/or English proficiency, and separating larger Asian subgroups into their own categories to support examination of outcomes among smaller communities.



**Detailed guidance can be found in our full report**, including: more information on each guidance point and steps for applying them; tips and considerations for putting them into practice; areas for future research; and a summary of the formative research methods and findings that informed the development of the guidance.

**3) Consider adapting the categories or using different ones when warranted by the analysis context and purpose.** Categories can be adapted to fit the purpose of the analysis, the characteristics of the sample population, and real-world constraints, while weighing the potential impact on comparability across studies.

## A New Tool for Researchers, Analysts, and Practitioners



This guidance offers a practical, empirically- and community-informed analytic approach to examining variation in well-being across Asian American communities. It is not intended to prescribe classification systems, policy decisions, or reporting requirements; rather, it expands the set of methods available for data disaggregation.

Applied to existing datasets, it provides a structured way to detect patterns and differences that may not be apparent in aggregated data. By organizing categories around factors tied to well-being, the guidance can help clarify where analytic gaps may exist. For new studies, it can support sample design and data collection from the outset, including identifying where efforts are needed to reach underrepresented communities and designing collection plans that enable robust analyses.

As with any methodological approach, applicability depends on analytic context, sample size, and data availability.

Ultimately, this guidance equips researchers, analysts, and practitioners with an additional lens for analyzing well-being data within the Asian American population, helping build an evidence base that captures the range of outcomes and experiences across communities.

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