

## **WOMEN OF COLOR AND REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE: ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER AMERICAN (APIA) WOMEN**

Reproductive justice, at the most basic, is a woman's right to control her own body and life. Contraception, maternity, forced/coerced contraception and sterilization, emergency contraception, family planning, abortion, and reproductive health (including issues of HIV/AIDS and other STIs) are all important parts of the broad topic of reproductive rights.

For Asian and Pacific Islander American Women, as for many women, reproductive rights is a multifaceted issue compounded by factors such as employment, access to culturally and linguistically competent healthcare, racism, and culture. For instance, Asian Pacific Islander Americans are typically seen as the 'model minority' in American society. This view tends to trivialize APIA health problems and ignore the diversity of the APIA populations in America, as well as leading to a lack of funding for health services for these communities. Similarly, 'Asian American' encompasses 60+ ethnicities with a wide range of economic, education and health levels.

Below are statistics and facts that further illustrate how different factors contribute to the denial of full reproductive rights for Asian American and Pacific Islander women in the United States.

### **Culturally Appropriate Reproductive Healthcare**

When women are denied knowledge about basic reproductive health services, they are not given the chance to live healthy reproductive lives. Many APIA women face cultural, linguistic, structural, and financial barriers to health care. It is especially hard for women to access these services when the outreach is culturally and linguistically inappropriate. Also, many traditional and culturally accepted forms of medicine such as acupuncture and herbal medicines are not covered by health care in America, adding to the disconnect between APIAs and health care providers.

- ❖ A 1986 national survey found that 81 percent of women who are forced by court orders to undergo Cesarean sections are African American, Latina, or Asian American. Twenty-four percent of those Asian and Latina women did not speak English as their first language (1).
- ❖ Cancer, specifically breast and cervical cancer, is the leading cause of death for APIA women (2). Many APIA women often do not get regular gynecological exams because they do not know about risk factors and believe that cancer is inevitably fatal. Also, Asian and Pacific Islander American women are at a higher risk for cancer than their non-American counterparts. "This increased risk is presumably related to the loss of protective factors from low-incidence Asian countries and greater risk for breast cancer associated with residents in the United States" (1, 4).
- ❖ According to a 1991-92 National (U.S.) Women of Color Reproductive Health Poll, 32% of Asian American women said that it would be difficult for them to obtain an abortion because "they don't know where to find one" (3).

Asian and Pacific Islander American women's health is shaped not only by how the mainstream U.S. healthcare system addresses issues relevant to APIA women but also how gender roles are constructed in their communities and families. As in most cultures, Asian families tend to place women in the role of "homemaker". This role can deny women the opportunity to place their health needs at the same level they place their family's needs.

# Take Action!

## Work to build solidarity in the movement:

- Work in coalition with multicultural student organizations on campus.
- Include all women of color in campus organizing.
- Focus on the intersections of gender, race, ability, age, sexual orientation and class; and how they affect all people.
- Remember that we can always learn from each other.

## Conduct a 'Faces of Feminism' Campaign

- Highlight the diversity within feminism by creating a collage or other visual representation of feminist figures in all areas of society.

Educate your campus about intersecting issues of reproductive justice with 'Did you know?' flyers and posters.

## Suggested Readings

- ❖ Far From Home: Shattering the Myth of the Model Minority  
By Mary Hayashi
- ❖ Asian American Women: Issues, Concerns, and Responsive Human and Civil Rights Advocacy: Lora Jo Foo  
- Ford Foundation
- ❖ Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organize for Reproductive Justice  
By Jael Silliman, Marlene Gerber Fried, Loretta Ross, and Elena R. Gutiérrez

## Notable Asian and Pacific Islander American Feminist Women

**Margaret Cho**, renowned comedian. Her one-woman show *I'm the One that I Want* was a big success and has been adapted for the screen.

**Mary K. Chung**, founder and president of the National Asian Women's Health Organization (NAWHO).

**Maxine Hong Kingston**, acclaimed author and feminist 'word warrior' who battles social and racial injustice in her work and her life.

**Honorable Yvonne Lee**, A Commissioner of the US Commission on Civil Rights from 1995-2001.

**Patsy Mink**, a democratic representative from Hawaii who co-authored Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments to the Higher Education Act.

**Helen Zia**, an activist author, and journalist, who advocates against racism and hate crimes. She is also a Feminist Majority Foundation Board Member.

**Kiran Ahuja**, the National Director of the [National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum \(NAPAWF\)](#): is a national grassroots organization with a mission to forge a progressive movement for the social and economic justice and political empowerment of APIA women and girls.

### National Asian Women's Health Organization

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

Comprehensive site for APIA health.

### National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum

<http://www.napawf.org/>

Community and activism site focusing on APIA women's and girls issues.

### Bamboo Girl Zine

<http://www.bamboogirl.com/current/index.html>

Feminist magazine for APIA grrls who don't quite fit the mainstream.

## RESOURCES

### Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice

<http://www.apirh.org/>

Information and activism on reproductive rights and APIA communities.

### Asian Women's Resource Exchange

<http://www.aworc.org/org/front.html>

Information resource and network whose aim is to address gender disparity on the internet.

### Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum

<http://www.apiahf.org/index.htm>

Health information and resource site.

### Asian and Pacific Islander Wellness Center

<http://www.apowellness.org/>

Addresses issues of HIV/AIDS in API communities.

### South Asian Women's Network

[www.umiacs.umd.edu/users/sawweb/sawnet/](http://www.umiacs.umd.edu/users/sawweb/sawnet/)

Umbrella organization and forum for South Asian women's issues.