

2021 Organizing Fellowship

ASIAN AMERICANS ON POLICING AND ABOLITION

Organizing Fellows

Abinaya Ilavarasan (*she/her*)

Lily Dutton (*she/her*)

Mindy Chang (*she/her*)

Melody Gao Shua Her (*she/her*)

PaNhia Vang (*she/her*)

Thai Loyd (*he/him*)

Report edited by

Fellows Program Coordinator

Marie Stebbings (*she/they*)



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INTRODUCTION

Since the murder of George Floyd and the following demand for police accountability, conversations about police abolition and reform have reached an all time high. In November, Minneapolis residents will vote on whether to replace the Minneapolis Police Department with a Department of Public Safety, effectively abolishing the current structure of the Minneapolis police.

Currently, there is limited research and understanding of how Asian Americans view policing and abolition. Gathering Asian American experiences and perspectives is important when talking about community policing, safety, and justice. While some folks feel that police endanger their communities based on their experiences, others can't see their lives without police officers existing in their communities. These diverging perspectives result from different upbringings, intersectional identities, and different ways of viewing how our communities operate.

In the summer of 2021, Asian American Organizing Project's Organizing Fellows worked on a participatory action research project, consisting of a survey, listening session, and workshop to better understand our communities perspectives on policing. The purpose of this report is to share our findings on how Asian Americans view policing and abolition. The goal is to continue this work in the future.

*This research was focused on 14 to 35 year old Asian Minnesotans!

ABOUT AAOP

Beginning 2016, Asian American Organizing Project (AAOP) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization founded to empower young Asian Minnesotans prioritizing LGBTQ+ and women/femme identified to create systems change for an equitable, conscious, and just society. Through a gender justice and critical cultural lens, AAOP addresses issues impacting our young Asian Minnesotan communities through youth participatory action research, grassroots organizing and canvassing, and narrative shift to co-create community change.

ABOUT THE ORGANIZING FELLOWSHIP

A 2-3 month long summer internship, AAOP's Organizing Fellowship invites young Asian Americans to learn and develop leadership and community skills. The program integrates civic engagement, community and cultural organizing, and participatory action research. Through the summer, Fellows connect with nonprofit organizations from across the state, learn how to engage as an active community member in their government, develop their own leadership project, and more. The focus of the 2021 Organizing Fellowship centered on a participatory action research project on Asian American youth and young people and our relationship to the police and key stakeholders in police abolition work.

ORGANIZING FELLOWS

SURVEY TEAM

Minneapolis born and raised and an avid museum and library lover, **Lily Dutton (she/her)** now attends the College of Charleston where she majors in Political Science and minors in Asian Studies and Middle Eastern and Islamic World Studies. For Lily, being an Asian American is an isolating identity; Lily has often been the singular Asian American person in internships and classes. Through AAOP's Fellowship program, she is reassured of the power of Asian Americans and our collective relevance. Lily hopes to gain a greater understanding of the police abolition movement within Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Melody Gao Shua Her (she/her) is a 2nd generation Hmong/Lao American, born and raised in Little Canada, Minnesota who has a passion for music, theater, environment, and social justice. She is a rising sophomore double majoring in Political Science and Economics with a minor in Criminal Justice Studies at St. Catherine University. Melody hopes that AAOP will allow her to connect with Minnesota's AAPI community on a deeper interpersonal level. Melody is looking forward to gaining more professional knowledge, learning new perspectives on abolition, and creating connections that she can depend on in the future to fight the good fight!

A North Ender, **Mindy Chang (she/her)** is a Sociology major at Augsburg University to learn more about community engagement and activism. She hopes to work in an environment where low-income and first-generation students are provided with an opportunity to have a place. Mindy hopes to gain a better context of abolition work and how to dismantle hate crimes that is rising against the AAPI community.

Note: The above biographies were originally published on AAOP social media in July 2021. Information in the biographies may be outdated as of the publishing of this report.

ORGANIZING FELLOWS

LISTENING SESSION TEAM

A longtime Minnesotan, **Abinaya Ilavarasan (she/her)** graduated from the University of Minnesota with a Bachelor's of Science in sociology this past spring. She is looking to be more involved in the AAPI community in the Twin Cities especially because AAPI are also impacted and harmed by police, so our voices need to be heard when it comes to abolition. Abinaya looks forward to learning more about abolition and how young AAPI perceive abolition, as well as developing her knowledge. She enjoys working out, taking walks, eating food, and watching shows/movies.

PaNhia Vang (she/her) is a rising junior at Lawrence University where she is a political science major and gender studies minor. She is also Hmong American and comes from a family household of ten people. Out of all her siblings, she is the first to attend a college and is a scholar of many scholarships. On the other hand, she has a strong passion for helping the AAPI community through community service such as canvassing and phone banking with local community organizations. PaNhia is looking forward to learning more about abolition and why it is central to advocacy work.

Thai Llyod (he/him) is a rising first year student at Loyola University Chicago who is passionate about the importance of education to creating social change. He hopes to learn what it means to be an organizer and how to bring people together for a common cause. Thai is looking forward to being a part of the AAOP team, getting to know the other Fellows, and interacting with and learning from other young AAPI folks in the community.

Note: The above biographies were originally published on AAOP social media in July 2021. Information in the biographies may be outdated or inaccurate as of the publishing of this report.

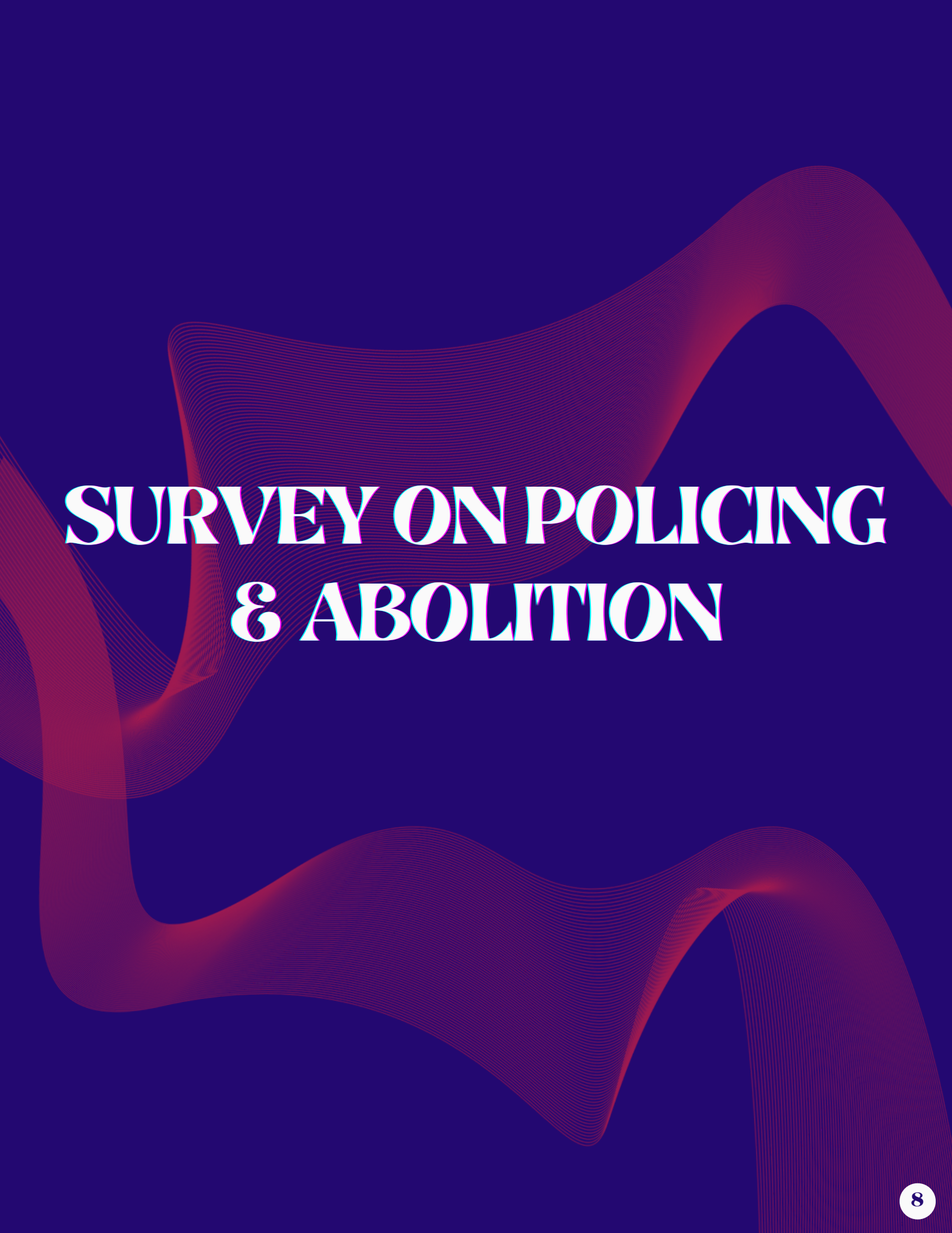
ABOLITION STATEMENT

Asian American Organizing Project (AAOP) believes in the intrinsic value of all human beings; that all people deserve their dignity, respect, and life no matter the labor they put out, language they speak, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, or otherwise.

Through that end, AAOP understands that current institutions like the police and Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) uphold the status quo at the expense of marginalized lives, especially Black and Brown folks. These institutions had been created on the foundations of white supremacist and imperialist ideologies that pits communities of color against each other. We know that these institutions cannot be reformed, but must be dismantled and divested. We often see this system referred to as “broken,” but that’s not true. This system was designed to keep the people in power in power at the expense of our Black and Brown communities, our Asian folks, immigrant and refugees, LGBTQA+, disabled, and more. A system working as it was designed to do cannot be fixed; it must be abolished.

At AAOP, our abolition work looks like:

- Addressing sexual violence within school systems. This work must be grounded in transformative justice.
- Providing political education to youth around the connections between capitalism, race, and policing and connecting all issues we talk about to an abolitionist, anti-capitalist perspective.
- Talking with our community about the Minneapolis ballot measure and its important and impact on our community.
- Holding conversations with our youth and young people on their experiences with police and similar institutions.
- Amplifying the work of local abolition organizers.
- Pushing against the dominant police-driven, authority-centered, surveillance-centered narrative.
- Incorporating political consciousness education within our onboarding process and how it is critical to our work.



SURVEY ON POLICING & ABOLITION

RESEARCH PROCESS

In July 2021, the Survey Team (Lily, Melody, and Mindy) released the “AAOP Survey on Policing and Abolition” survey, which evaluated how various Asian American identities in Minnesota perceive policing and police abolition. The survey targeted young adult (ages 14-35) Asian Americans in Minnesota.

The assessment was conducted between July 8th - July 15th, 2021 with 136 Asian Minnesotan respondents who met the demographic criteria. (362 people responded but 226 were excluded due to either being located outside Minnesota or identifying as older than 35.) Lily, Melody, and Mindy used quota and snowball sampling to target their audience. Due to the sampling size and methods, this research was and is not representative of the Asian American population.

The survey was conducted via a Google form and had 18 open and closed-ended questions. The independent variables were: age, ethnicity, county, sex, and gender. The dependent variables were the perceptions Asian Americans had on police abolition. The Survey Team used qualitative and quantitative data to analyze these perceptions.



AAOP Survey on Policing and Abolition

Dear Recipient,

We are the Organizing Fellowship interns under Asian American Organizing Project (AAOP).

EDITOR'S NOTE

In reviewing the survey data for this report, I found the majority of the survey responses were fraudulent. This is an unfortunately common side effect of creating a survey that provides a financial incentive (survey respondents were entered in a raffle to win one of 10 \$50 Visa gift cards) and discusses a politically antagonistic topic (policing and police abolition).

Fraudulent responses were removed based on the following criteria:

Red Flag - Instant removal

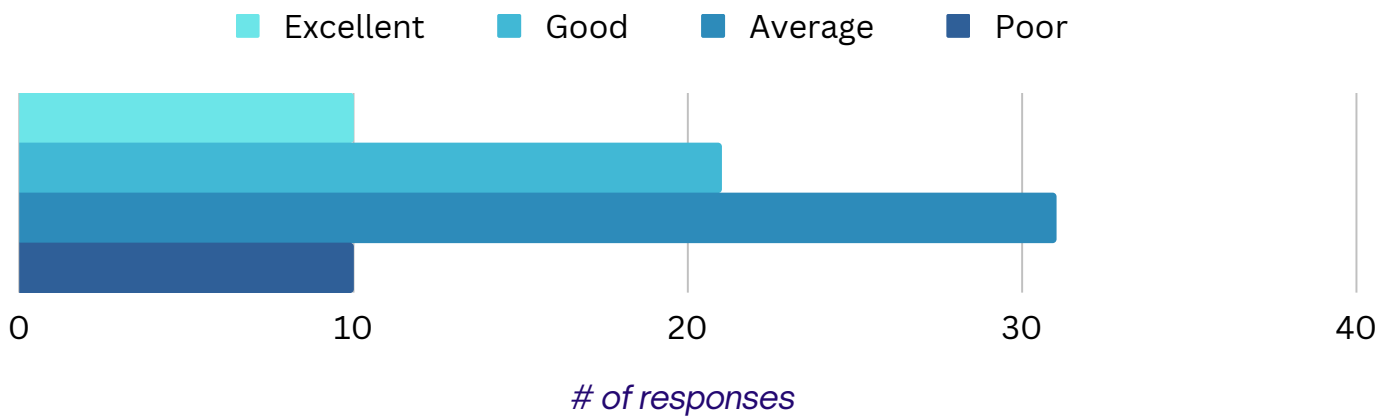
1. All of the text entry (short and long answer) responses from multiple respondents are identical
2. Two or more of the text entry responses do not answer the questions or are nonsensical

Yellow Flag - Removed if they meet 3 or more of the following criteria

1. Similar email or similar email format between “different” responses (excluding recognizable school (.edu) or work format emails)
2. The email is a random string of letters and numbers
3. One or more of the text entry (short and long answer) responses is identical to another participant’s response
4. One of the text entry responses does not answer the question or is nonsensical
5. The response shares similar wording, grammar, or punctuation with other responses that were submitted around the same time
6. The response shares identical multiple choice responses with other responses that were submitted around the same time
7. The participant ‘straightlined’ the multiple-choice responses by choosing the same option for each response (ex. responding “agree” to everything)

63 responses were identified as fraudulent and removed. This brought the total number of usable responses to 73 (136-63=73).

What has been your general experience with Minnesota police?



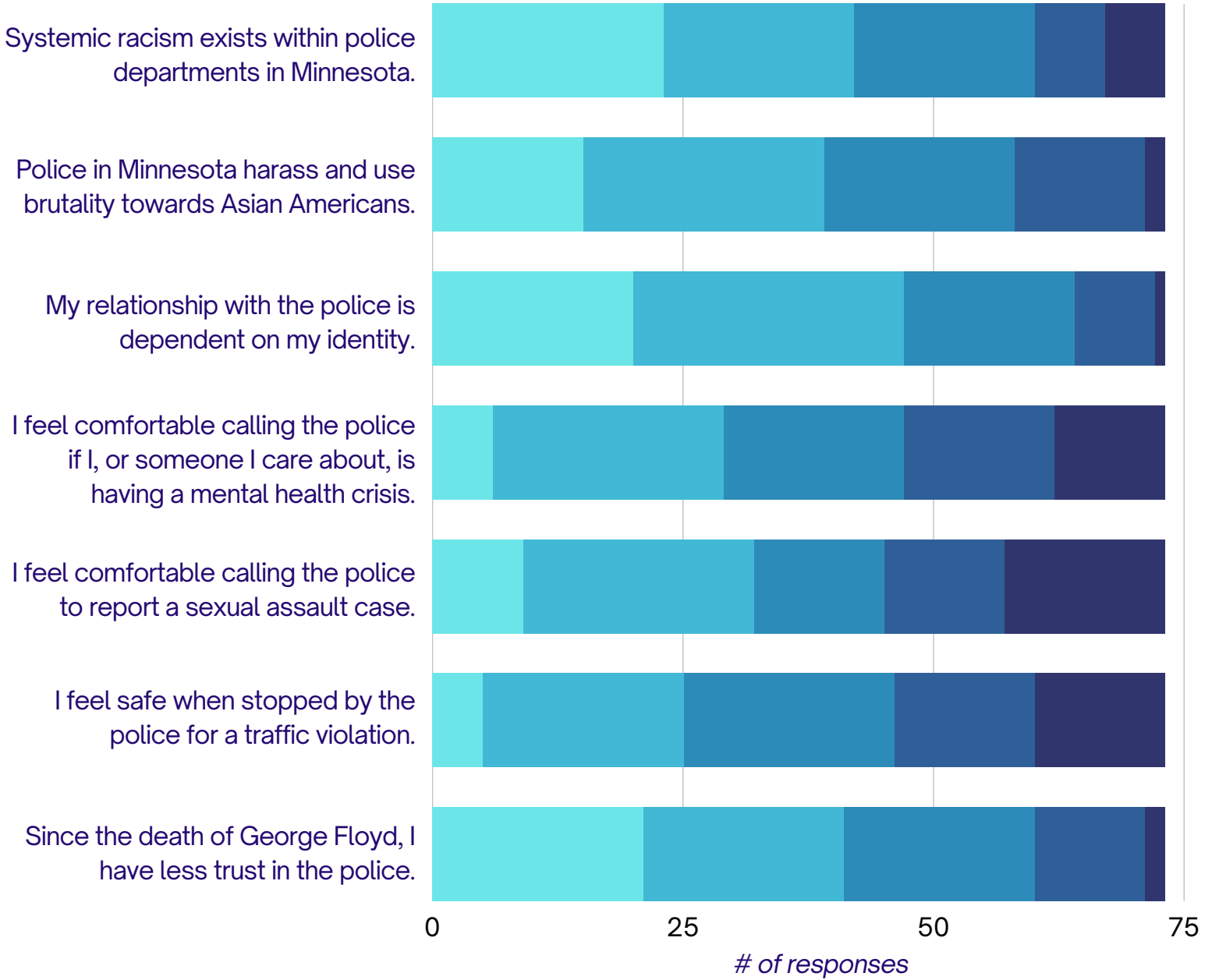
Ideally, how do you think the police should exist in your community?

A few of the responses:

- Serve as a backup to other social services? Ideally, I wouldn't prefer police presence in my community.
- I believe there is a need for more proper training and classes that discuss racism and homophobia. There should be warnings and penalties to cops who do not follow the law. Police should be more involved in communities to rebuild the trust between police and citizens. I believe the police are needed to help keep the communities safe, but right now it's hard to trust police due to what's going on in many states - police shooting people of color.
- Should treat everyone equally and not jump to conclusions based on gender or race.
- No police, ever. But, until other systems of safety exist and are democratize, we must have community control of police.
- I believe in defunding the police and moving those resources to education, public health, mental health, housing, and other key areas of community support. This work will eliminate/decrease the need for the police. Especially since they have made most situations such as traffic stops and sexual assault cases worse
- Mostly be used as a resource to help solve violent crimes; exist and intervene without weapons in issues of actual public safety threats; protect the most marginalized communities

For each statement, please indicate your level of agreement.

■ Strongly Agree
 ■ Agree
 ■ Neutral
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Strongly Disagree



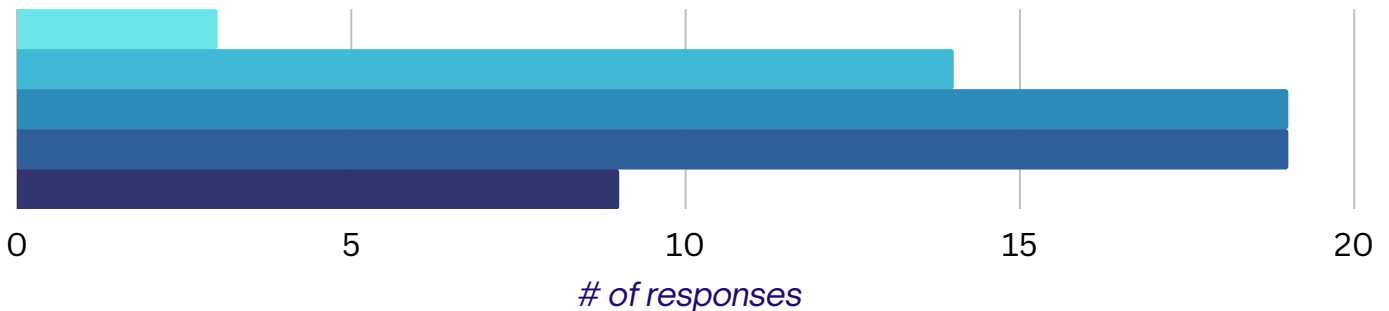
What are 1-2 words/phrases that come to mind when you hear "abolition" ?



How would you describe your knowledge of police abolition work?

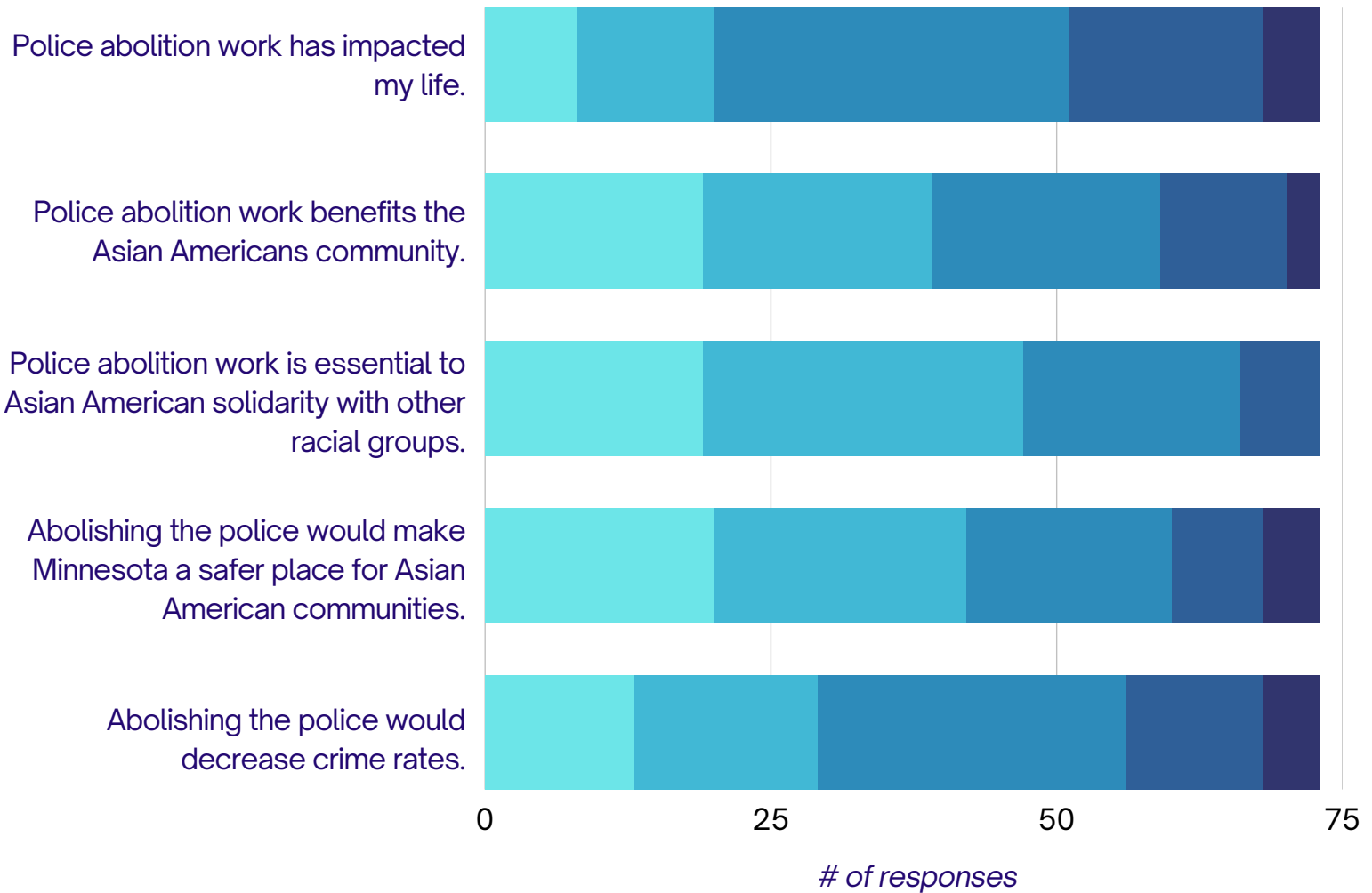
1 = I know nothing about police abolition work
 5 = I know a great deal about police abolition work

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5



For each statement, please indicate your level of agreement.

■ Strongly Agree
 ■ Agree
 ■ Neutral
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Strongly Disagree



The background features a dark purple gradient with several flowing, wavy bands of red and pink. These bands are composed of many thin, parallel lines that create a sense of depth and movement. The overall aesthetic is modern and dynamic.

LISTENING SESSIONS

RESEARCH PROCESS

Abi, Thai, and PaNhia designed, facilitated, and analyzed the data from two listening sessions in July 2021. The purpose of the listening sessions was to gather narratives, experiences, and thoughts on law enforcement from Asian Americans in Minnesota. Participants were asked 10 discussion questions in three categories: community safety, policing, and abolition.

Recruitment

We recruited participants by creating graphics on Canva and having an RSVP form to sign up

Participants were given an incentive (\$35 gift card) for attending the listening sessions

Dates & participants

July 20th, 2021 from 6-7:30pm
Nine participants
12 sign-ups

July 22nd, 2021 from 6-7:30pm
Three participants
Seven sign-ups

RESULTS

Abi, Thai, and PaNhia analyzed the common words, phrases, and quotations that participants voiced about their experiences with law enforcement. While some people feel that police endanger their communities based on their experiences, others can't see their lives without police officers existing in their communities. These diverging perspectives result from different upbringings, intersectional identities, and different ways of viewing how our communities operate.

Below are the specific findings for each listening session question.

Community Safety Questions

What does community safety look like to you?

Community safety means trusting each other and not having to worry about personal safety. This can look like: feeling like you belong, having people to call, and being able to go out without worrying about the safety of yourself or those around you.

“For me, I think, safety for the community is building a really strong connection with trust, with each other, and with people who are representing and protecting the community.”

Do you feel safe in your own community?

Participants do not feel safe in their communities, and do not feel their needs are being met. Common causes include: Covid-19, anti-Asian hate, shootings, lack of diversity, fear of men, and distrust of the government.

“In my city, where I go out, I am scared because the police are not going to be on my side because we were protesting them for a whole year.”

What is your definition of justice? Do you think your community is achieving it?

There is no clear understanding of what ‘justice’ is. However, there is a common sentiment that the current justice system does not match the ideal.

“[Inequity] is driven from violence and in my community, in order to survive, you have to go into the violence. As an Asian American, there were a lot of people I know who engaged in anti-Blackness to be safe.”

“At this point, I just don’t want hate crimes when I go out with my friends. Working towards a space where me and my friends and other folks can go out and feel accepted in their environment and feel welcomed. I think my community is working towards it, I don’t think we’re achieving it per se but there’s been a lot of stuff that’s been happening this past year.”

Policing Questions

When you hear the word “police,” how do you feel? (e.g., changes in your behavior, mental/physical health)

In general, participants feel uneasy when they hear the word ‘police’, and for some it evokes fear. Some feel desensitized to the word, besides in situations where police are present.

“Being an immigrant, there’s a sentiment where we do fear the police. Even if we have the legal papers, it’s just scary; we don’t want to get deported.”

Have you ever had an interaction with the police? If so, what did that look like?

Some participants had positive interactions, ex. the police helping diffuse a tense situation after a bomb threat at their workplace. Other participants had negative or stressful interactions, and commonly cited that the police were not helpful in resolving the situation.

“My feelings and behavior completely change when I’m around police. I try not to interact with them. It’s a weird mix because over time, in everything that I’ve witnessed recently, it’s hard to take the police seriously. But when you also have the influence from your family, that you have to take them seriously for immigration things or stigmas they’ve built up over generations of my family, it’s hard to balance the two. They’re a joke to me but at the same time, I know they have some kind of power over me. It’s not fun.”

How did your family/friends talk to you about the police? How was it talked about at school/in your community?

Parents were influential in how participants viewed the police. For some, listening to police was instilled in the family, or parents would say to be careful of the police at a young age. Participants also said police presenting themselves in educational institutions (ex. field trips to police stations, police officers coming to school to showcase their dogs) was common.

“My family was always like, “The police don’t like you so don’t interact with them.” But they never took a hard stance on abolition.”

What are other resources that you could contact besides the police?

Common resources that could be contacted besides the police include family, friends, help centers or services.

Abolition Questions

Ideally, how do you think the police should exist in your community?

There was a divided response; some believe police are necessary to maintain order and must exist, but some are unsure exactly how they should exist. Others view that police are harmful and not needed.

“No matter how many times you try to reform the police, there’s just so much history there and there’s just so much trauma in so many communities that you can’t get rid of. You take the cop outfit out and you hide the tasers, it still doesn’t change the fact that they represent something that doesn’t partner who you are.”

“I don’t think we should abolish the police, we should break down the foundation of how the police were created. We need to find more resources that help support them and have someone else do it for them.”


What do you think of when you hear the word “abolition”?

Most participants associate abolition with police abolition and defunding the police. They want to know more about it and how they can show support. Others think abolition refers to the historical movement to end slavery.

What are your thoughts on police abolition? Do you agree or disagree?

There is a mixed reaction on whether police should be abolished. Some participants say that police should be abolished because they are not doing their jobs in protecting citizens. Some disagree and say that the police should continue existing to enforce laws.

“When there was talk about defunding the police, I was worried that they [my family members] would lose their jobs.”



RECOMMENDATIONS & RESOURCES



RECOMMENDATIONS

What should organizers, researchers, and non-profits do or keep in mind when working towards police abolition?

Research recommendations

- Intersectionality is important! When soliciting and analyzing data, use an additive model of identity which emphasizes how different demographics (race, sexuality, income, etc.) shape a person's responses and experiences. Incorporate intersectional analysis across all forms of research - from surveys to listening sessions.
- Create a power map! A power map should include an analysis of influential supporters of police abolition, which is helpful for identifying who in the community organizers can look to for support.
- Use snowball sampling, ex. when someone completes a survey or RSVP link, ask them to send the link to 5 other people.

Outreach recommendations

- Based on the survey data, the younger generation of Asian Americans lacks knowledge and is interested in learning more about police abolition. Options for outreach include interactive conversations on social media, and facilitating educational, safe spaces for conversations about police abolition to destigmatize it.
- Ensure you are outreaching to a diverse group of people. Contact LGBTQIA+ organizations, South Asian organizations, etc. If hosting an event, make sure to have language accessibility, turn on closed captions during Zoom meetings, and provide other accommodations that come up.

RESOURCES

Organizations

MPD150 (mpd150.com)

Reclaim The Block (reclaimtheblock.org)

#8toAbolition (8toabolition.com)

Black Visions Collective (blackvisionsmn.org)

Seward LongFellow Restorative Justice (slrj.org)

Restorative Justice Community Action (rjca-inc.org)

Asian Women United of Minnesota (awum.org)

Books

"We Do This Til We Free Us" by Mariame Kaba

"The End of Policing" by Alex S. Vitale

"So You Want To Talk About Race" by Ijeoma Oluo

"Caste" by Isabel Wilkerson

Other Resources

Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (samhsa.gov)

Community Outreach for Psychiatric Emergency (call [612-596-1223](tel:612-596-1223).)

MPD 150 Report (mpd150.com/report)

Check out their zines!