



EXPAND AND REFINE DATA COLLECTION RELATING TO THE SOUTH ASIAN COMMUNITY.

South Asians belong to a diverse community representing different countries of origin, religions, and languages. As the community expands, it is **important to obtain accurate and specific demographic data about the population** which are essential to policymakers, governmental agencies, and organizations serving the community. The collection and disaggregation of demographic data affects the proper distribution of public benefits; accurate apportionment of Congressional representatives; provision of resources and information in South Asian languages; and a comprehensive assessment of the community's health needs.

At the national level, the U.S. Census Bureau administers the decennial Census (a nationwide count that occurs every ten years) and the annual American Community Survey (sent to approximately 2.5% of all U.S. households each year¹). Various state agencies often collect data about communities for a variety of reasons. While data collection has provided critical baseline information about the South Asian community, **further disaggregated data related to national origin, ancestry, religious affiliation, language ability, immigration and citizenship status, economic status, gender, and health disparities are needed.** In addition, **increased outreach to South Asian communities is necessary** to properly capture information about the community. In-depth data collection techniques are needed to reflect the full extent the diversity of needs within the South Asian community in the United States.

Data on South Asians Disaggregated by National Origin and Religion Currently, many data collection surveys used by various federal and state agencies ask individuals to self-report their race, ancestry, and national origin. Often individuals from Bangladesh, Caribbean nations, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka find that their countries of origin are not specifically delineated as options to select on these forms. For example, the 2000 U.S. Census form only included "Asian Indian" as a choice for South Asians answering the race question; consequently, non-Indian South Asians had to choose between "Asian Indian" or fill in a response under the "Other Asian" category. As a result, South Asians may tend to choose more general or inaccurate answers to reflect their racial background. In the 2000 U.S. Census, this may have led to undercounts of the Bangladeshi, Indo-

Caribbean, Nepali, Pakistani, and Sri Lankan populations. In addition, there is currently no data collected on most federal and state data collection forms that capture information regarding religious affiliation. South Asians practice a diversity of faiths, including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Sikhism, and Zoroastrianism. Yet accurate figures are unavailable on the size and concentration of these faith communities.

Outreach to South Asian Communities by Government Data Collection Agencies Historically, immigrant communities have been reluctant to participate in data collection efforts for a variety of reasons. These include the lack of translated data collection tools; insufficient information about why and how data is being

collected; and distrust of government agencies. For example, questionnaires administered by the U.S. Census Bureau are not currently produced in any South Asian languages, which impede the ability to reach those in the community who do not speak English. Similarly, mistrust of government agencies often results in reluctance to provide personal information to authorities, regardless of the purpose.

In addition, data collection efforts can be limited due to the lack of South Asian census takers and outreach staff at data collection agencies. Under federal law, the U.S. Census Bureau can employ only U.S. citizens as census takers. While waivers were made available in 1999 for noncitizens, nationals of certain countries, including Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, were initially not allowed to be hired. The policy subsequently changed in 2000 to allow the hiring of Bangladeshi, Indian, and Pakistani nationals with bilingual abilities, but mishandled implementation of the policy by the Census Bureau led to the rejection of many South Asian applicants.ⁱⁱ Given the linguistic and cultural diversity among South Asians, noncitizens from South Asia would be valuable additions to the staff of both federal and state data collection agencies.

Immigration Enforcement and Information Sharing during Data Collection Efforts

The Census Bureau has acknowledged that immigrants, especially those who are out of status, may be reluctant to participate in data collection efforts. It is important that all data collection efforts at the state or national level include assurances that personal information collected will not be shared with other government entities, particularly with immigration enforcement agencies.

In addition, since 1970, immigration enforcement agencies have agreed to limit or halt raids against immigrants while the decennial census was being conducted. However, as of June 2008, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has not agreed to suspend raids. With the estimated numbers of undocumented immigrants from South Asian and other countries on the rise, it is vital that enforcement activities be suspended during future data collection efforts, such as Census 2010.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Require federal and state agencies to disaggregate data on various issues among various South Asian subpopulations.

- Federal and state data collection agencies should provide specific South Asian subgroups (e.g. Bangladeshi, Indian, Indo-Caribbean, Nepali, Pakistani, Sri Lankan), countries of origin, and religions as categories on data collection survey forms.
- Federal and state data collection agencies should provide disaggregated data based on specific South Asian subgroups, countries of origin, gender, and religions for statistics gathered on various issues including discrimination, education, hate crimes, and health.

DID YOU KNOW?

It is vital to develop partnerships with community-based organizations and leaders when embarking upon data collection within the South Asian community. While undercounting continues to be a concern, partnerships established between the Census Bureau and immigrant communities in 2000 helped to improve the accuracy of demographic data on minority communities as compared to previous decades.

Improve data collection agencies' outreach efforts within the South Asian community.

- Federal and state data collection agencies should maintain and expand partnerships with South Asian community organizations.
- Federal and state data collection agencies, along with community-based organizations, should increase outreach to the South Asian community on how to fill out the forms accurately.
- Federal and state data collection agencies should provide materials and questionnaires in South Asian languages.
- The U.S. Census Bureau should allow the hiring of bilingual South Asian census takers regardless of immigration status.
- Federal and state data collection agencies should utilize South Asian ethnic media outlets to increase awareness about demographic data collection efforts.

Cease immigration enforcement raids while demographic data collection is being conducted.

- ICE should not conduct immigration raids during national Census efforts.
- Federal and state data collection agencies should ensure that information pertaining to individual survey participants remains confidential and is not disclosed to immigration enforcement authorities.

ⁱ *American Community Survey Factsheet*, U.S. Census Bureau (2007).

ⁱⁱ *Asian Pacific Americans and Census 2000: Findings and Recommendations for Census 2000*, Asian American Justice Center (2001).