



STEP INTO LONG BEACH:

Exposing how Cambodian American youth are under resourced, over policed and fighting back for their wellness



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Cambodian American Youth Experience in Long Beach, California

In this report we present the experiences and opinions of second generation Cambodian American youth, much of which has not been formally documented. This report is groundbreaking for a myriad of reasons. Youth developed, disseminated, and analyzed a survey of approximately 500 youth in Long Beach, California. They also conducted focus groups and analyzed and disseminated these findings as well. Their findings highlight issues that touch upon every aspect of their lives, from parental expectations to racial profiling to sex and sexuality.

As a newer immigrant community to arrive in the United States, second generation Cambodian Americans experienced unique challenges in adapting to mainstream American culture. While the Cambodian population is dispersed throughout the United States, Long Beach, California has the largest population of Cambodians outside of Cambodia. We hope that our focus on Long Beach as the research site provides insights into issues specific to all Cambodian American communities. More broadly, we hope that these issues are also applicable to all second generation youth in urban communities.

➤ Demographics of Survey Sample

The survey analysis contained within this report is based on a sample of 333 of the survey respondents.

- About 75% of the survey respondents are between the ages of 15–17 and 55% are female, while 45% are male.
- Fifty-three percent (53%) of the survey respondents have 5 people or less in their family and 47% have 6 or more family members.
- Only 4% of the survey respondents are immigrants, so the majority of the survey respondents are second-generation and were born in the United States.
- Sixty-four percent (64%) of the respondents indicated that English is the primary language spoken at home, while 23% reported that Khmer is the primary language spoken at home.

➤ Educational attainment, access and discrimination

Youth found it difficult to bridge the gaps between aspiring and being encouraged to attend college and the actual steps it takes to achieve this goal.

- The majority of youth survey respondents reported that their parents expected them to attend and complete college. However, many of the youth and their parents lacked basic information about preparing for and attending college.
- High numbers of youth also felt that they experienced discriminatory treatment at school. Qualitative data demonstrates that youth may have equated discrimination at school with a lack of resources and access.

➤ Discrimination

Youth survey respondents experienced discrimination in many aspects of their lives, which in turn impacted their access to economic security, college attainment, and safe neighborhoods.

- Approximately 56% of the youth survey respondents feel that the Cambodian American community faces discrimination. When asked about experiencing discrimination, Cambodian American youth surveyed feel that the Cambodian community faces discrimination within the following key areas: language (56%), job

opportunities (68%), racial profiling (73%), and education attainment (74%).

- » In regards to experiencing differential treatment based on race/ethnicity, the males surveyed were more likely to report being treated or perceived negatively based on race/ethnic group.

» High rates of racial profiling

Racial profiling by law enforcement is often thought of as targeting African American and Latino males. However, the majority of the Cambodian American youth survey respondents had experienced racial profiling in various forms.

- » The males in the survey sample experience these specific acts of discrimination and racism at higher rates than the females.
- » Racial profiling by the police was experienced by the male survey respondents in the following ways. Approximately 39% were stopped by law enforcement, 38% were pulled over, 23% were arrested, 21% were taken to the police station, and 16% were hurt physically.

» Deportation

Deportation is another example of discrimination and racial profiling experienced disproportionately by Cambodian American families.

- » Approximately 1 in 3 Cambodian American youth (34.7%) know someone in their family or community that has been deported or is facing deportation.
- » The deportation of one individual from a family impacts economic, familial, and housing stability.

» High rates of depression

Youth survey respondents reported alarming rates of depression that could be linked to other mental health and health related issues such as alcohol abuse.

- » Of the survey questions that addressed health and safety issues, the youths' responses to a Center for Epidemiologic Studies Short Depression Scale (CES-D 10) about how often they felt depressed were alarming.

- » Youth survey respondents had high scores on a scientifically validated measure of depressive symptoms. This finding suggests that these youth may be at significant risk for developing or having depression.

» Cultural Stigmas around Sex, Sexuality, and Sexual Orientation

The cultural stigmas around discussing sex, sexuality, and sexual orientation prevent youth from participating in open, honest discussions, seeking educational resources, and relying on familial support.

- » Young women, young men, and LGBTQI youth in the Cambodian American community experience cultural stigmas around sexual activity that makes it difficult to discuss sex.
- » While a large number of the survey respondents (86%) know where to get access to sex and health education, many youth don't put into practice what they know about safe sex and pregnancy prevention.
- » Since it is challenging to discuss sex or sexuality, little is known about the Southeast Asian number of Cambodian youth that identify themselves as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Inter Sex (LGBTQI).



Recommendations

In the area of Immigrant and Refugee Rights, we recommend the following:

- » Prevent continued state and federal cuts to programs that provide families with economic security, which would in turn support the sustainability and development of communities.
- » Ensure that Cambodians with low levels of English proficiency are provided with programs that ensure language access, government services that provide English language translation and interpreters and programs that assist Cambodian parents develop English language skills.
- » Provide information to parents and students about college preparation and the college application process. At a minimum, minority outreach programs such as GEAR UP and TRIO should actively recruit Cambodian American students as participants. Schools and school districts could also develop information and resources to be disseminated in Khmer to parents and students.
- » Improve high school dropout prevention programs by actively outreaching to and recruiting Cambodian youth.
- » Integrate ethnic studies into the K-12 education curriculum; specifically integrate Cambodian refugee experiences into the local education curriculum and Cambodian refugee history into special projects developed by the school district.
- » Develop and implement programs that encourage cultural competency training for school counselors.
- » Construct systematic ways in which communities can address deportation issues through legal aid services, community organizing, and community based services.

In the area of Reproductive Justice, we have the following recommendations:

- » Devote additional resources to reproductive health education beyond abstinence.
- » Evaluate existing reproductive health education available to youth in the local area.
- » Collaborate with other community based organizations to develop culturally appropriate reproductive health education curriculum in K-12 education.
- » Reject continued state and federal cuts to programs and funding streams that support reproductive rights for women, which would in turn support the sustainability and development of communities.
- » Invest funds from the Affordable Care Act to develop strategies for improving preventative care and public health education.

In the area of Health and Safety, we have the following recommendations:

- » Improve access to and knowledge of available mental health services.
- » Ensure that school staff and teachers are able to address bullying in a culturally competent manner by providing workshops.
- » Establish a local youth commission to provide input and insight on the development of local enforcement, economic development and community revitalization policy.



1355 Redondo Ave, Suite 9
Long Beach, CA 90804
p. 562.986.9415
f. 562.986.9416
www.kgalb.org