

Supporting Southeast Asian American Men and Boys in Education



Rising Up: The Southeast Asian American Educational Journey

Educational outcomes are improving for Southeast Asian Americans—but not fast enough for boys and men. Harmful gender-based stereotypes criminalize Southeast Asian American boys and men and exacerbate barriers to educational opportunity. Educational equity demands better data on Southeast Asian American students and initiatives that support Southeast Asian American men and boys to succeed in college and beyond.

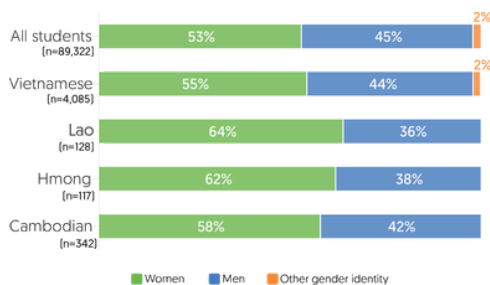
Gender gap is growing in higher education

Southeast Asian American women are outpacing men in higher education, a trend that is common across racial and ethnic groups nationally. For example, more women than men received degrees in 2024–25 in the University of California (UC) system across all Southeast Asian American communities (Figure 1). The largest gender gaps emerged among Lao and Hmong communities. The UC system is one of the only higher education institutions reporting outcomes for Southeast Asian American students.

Nationally, Southeast Asian American women enroll in college at higher rates than men, which will further the gender gap. The difference is particularly stark among Lao students, with women enrolling at nearly twice the rate of men (Figure 2).

CALIFORNIA DATA

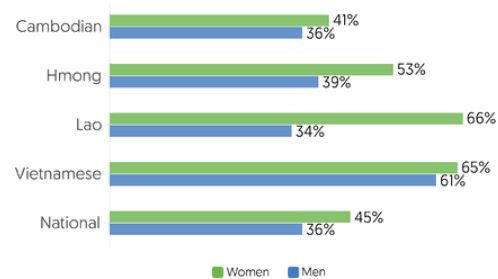
Figure 1. Degree Recipient Headcount, Any Level, by Ethnicity and Gender, University of California (2024-25)



Source: University of California, 2025

NATIONAL DATA

Figure 2. Percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds Enrolled in Postsecondary Education, by Ethnicity and Gender, United States (2022)



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2023

Stereotypes drive gender gap

The gender gap in higher education has roots in harmful stereotypes about Southeast Asian American boys and girls in K-12 education. First, the “model minority myth” harms Southeast Asian American students of all genders. Educators and institutions that perpetuate this stereotype that all Asians are well-off and well-educated overlook the needs of Southeast Asian American students to succeed.¹

In response to the “model minority” stereotype, Southeast Asian American boys experience pressure to demonstrate “toughness” and may be stereotyped as “gangsters.”² As a result, Southeast Asian American boys are more likely to be disciplined in school and experience higher arrest rates than boys from other Asian American communities.³

In contrast, Southeast Asian American girls are stereotyped as “good girls” who do well in school. Their higher level of educational attainment comes at a cost of familial conflict, a low sense of belonging, or being pitted against the boys in their community.⁴



Seeking support, not just academically but physically and mentally, was very hard, near impossible. I felt like I was categorized into this group where everything was always okay—exactly the model minority myth.

— Southeast Asian American student

Disaggregated data illuminate unseen gender gap

Across federal, state, local, district, or institutional data sources, close to none of them collect, analyze, or report disaggregated data for Southeast Asian American communities. Even fewer report data by gender within those communities. For example, no national dataset captures outcomes for Southeast Asian American boys and girls at the K-12 level—a significant gap in understanding the needs of these students.

Without disaggregated data, the gender gap remains hidden and the “model minority,” “gangster,” and “good girl” stereotypes persist. With disaggregated data, however, Southeast Asian American students, their families and communities, educators, schools, and policymakers have the evidence they need to improve educational access and success for Southeast Asian American boys and men.

Recommendations

- ✦ Include Southeast Asian Americans in research, advocacy, and policy making to improve education for boys and men.
- ✦ Invest in programs targeted to support boys and men in school and college, including Southeast Asian American boys and men.
- ✦ Dispel harmful narratives, such as the “gangster” male, the “good girl,” or the “model minority” myth, through research, disaggregated data, and storytelling.
- ✦ Demand full, timely implementation of Statistical Policy Directive No. 15 (SPD 15), which requires all federal agencies to disaggregate race and ethnicity data beyond the aggregate “Asian” category.

About this fact sheet

This fact sheet is one in a series accompanying [Rising Up: the Southeast Asian American Educational Journey](#) (2026), a report on Southeast Asian American students from Southeast Asia Resource Action Center.

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