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## Fargo-Moorhead's Asian community experiencing racism during coronavirus pandemic

"Other viruses all across the world have started in other countries, and now this is being used to create more division inside America against China," a local Asian leader told The Forum.

Written By: C.S. Hagen | 11:58 am, Mar. 19, 2021





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Moorhead, U.S. citizens of Asian descent who call the metro area their home are feeling the hate.

Annie Prafke, originally from Anhui Province in China, says she gets “a little panicky” anytime she sees a group of boys on bicycles while on her nightly walks.

Yang Jun, president of the nonprofit group, United Chinese Americans—Fargo-Moorhead, said he’s heard multiple reports of Chinese people being cursed at while grocery shopping.

The swell of racism has even spilled over to some local residents who are not Asian. Renee Ellis, a member of the Navajo Nation, is frequently mistaken for being Asian. In recent weeks, she said she’s been spat at and cursed at while working as an Uber driver.

Much of the hatred began locally after the coronavirus pandemic, first identified in China, reached the region in the spring of 2020. Across the nation, more than 1,000 reported cases of coronavirus-related attacks and racial discrimination have been aimed at Asian Americans, according to the [Human Rights Watch](#).



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Some incidents have erupted in violence. In April 2020, an Asian woman in Brooklyn [was attacked with acid](#) while taking out her garbage. A few weeks earlier a [man stabbed a Burmese-American](#) and his two children, ages 2 and 6, at a Sam’s Club in Texas. In January, an 84-year-old immigrant from Thailand was [knocked unconscious in an attack in San Francisco](#) and later died.

In Atlanta, eight people, including six Asian women, were gunned down Tuesday at three different spas. While the suspected shooter has told authorities the killings were not racially motivated, the episode has unnerved Asian communities around the country.



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grosby and her partner.

A report from [Stop AACI Hate](#), a national coalition aimed at addressing anti-Asian discrimination amid the pandemic, counted 3,795 hate-fueled incidents against Asians, primarily Chinese people, from March 19, 2020, to Feb. 28, 2021. Of that total, 42 occurred in Minnesota.

## 'They've asked me if I eat bats'

Prafke was adopted at 6 years old. Growing up in Fargo, she was bullied and picked on in grade school, and the abuse made her believe something was wrong with her.

“For the most part I had very good friends and people were kind. But I definitely did get comments. Kids made fun of me because of my eyes or facial features because I didn’t look like everyone else. I thought of it as more of personal flaws rather than people bullying me or conceptualizing it as racism,” Prafke said.

Prafke began accepting her Chinese heritage as she grew older. But she’s been facing the old ignorant biases again since the emergence of the coronavirus, which many researchers believe originated in bats.

“There’s a group of middle school boys in my neighborhood who honestly continuously harass me when I go for walks at night. They’ve asked me if I eat bats, asking me over and over to the point of harassment and it’s hard in those moments to know what to say,” she said.



“I guess I just don’t know how to react. It feels like I’m back in elementary school being bullied and it makes me not want to go out actually,” Prafke said. “I feel a little panicky when I see a group of boys on bikes.”

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## 'I don't understand why'

Ma Youchao, a local professor, hasn't been the target of racist epithets, but he's fully aware of the national rise of hate against Asians.

"I don't understand why they have such a vehement attitude toward Asians recently. Asians who come to America are trying to survive, they are obeying the laws and providing for families and friends," Ma said.

Locally, Ma still feels safe but fears the hatred will continue to spread.

"It makes me feel very disappointed. In Fargo, however, we feel very safe, but in the future I don't know how this might change. I have a daughter who will soon be in college. I am a little worried about that," Ma said.

Jin Li, another local professor, said he's heard anti-Asian speeches from senators such as Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn., who introduced legislation to allow Americans to sue a foreign state, namely China, and Tom Cotton, R-Ark., who's suggested that Chinese students should not be allowed to live in the U.S. to obtain science degrees from U.S. universities.

"Personally I think some politicians should take the blame, especially Trump who decried the China virus," Jin said. "It's just ignorant. It's terrible to see politicians make comments like that and walk away without any consequence. This is very, very dangerous."

## 'The China virus'

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mind, so that's what I run into, people speaking their truth when they're intoxicated," she said.

"I've come into a couple of times mostly drunk older white men who will get in" and use racial slurs, Ellis said. "Or they'll say, 'Hey, did you know that you're part of the China virus?'"

One time a customer she dropped off spat at her and missed, she said.

Such treatment has led her to change her driving habits. She said she doesn't pick up anyone after 1 a.m. anymore and works longer during the day.

"I was raised to know that they don't know any better, or maybe I'm here to teach them not to be idiots," Ellis said.

## 'We are all struggling'

Yang has spent the better part of the last decade in North Dakota.

"I really like Fargo and Minnesota because most people here are very nice, and are helpful without conditions," Yang said. "Not too many people treat me wrong here."

But he said he has friends who have been cursed at locally while grocery shopping.

Yang's United Chinese Americans—Fargo-Moorhead group works to foster understanding of Chinese culture. When the pandemic began, the nonprofit organization imported more than 10,000 masks and donated them to Sanford Health, local fire and police departments.

"We're concerned about what happens here, so we will try hard to help," he said. "We are all struggling."

Yang said politicians need to bring people together instead of creating divisions.

"Yes, this virus is most likely from China, but you can't call it a China virus. You shouldn't attach a country's name to a virus. Other viruses all across the world have started in other countries, and now this is being used to create more division inside America against China," Yang said.

Prafke agreed, saying that calling the coronavirus the China virus places the blame on Chinese people who are suffering and outraged, just like everyone else. For the first time in her life, she's worried about being a target.



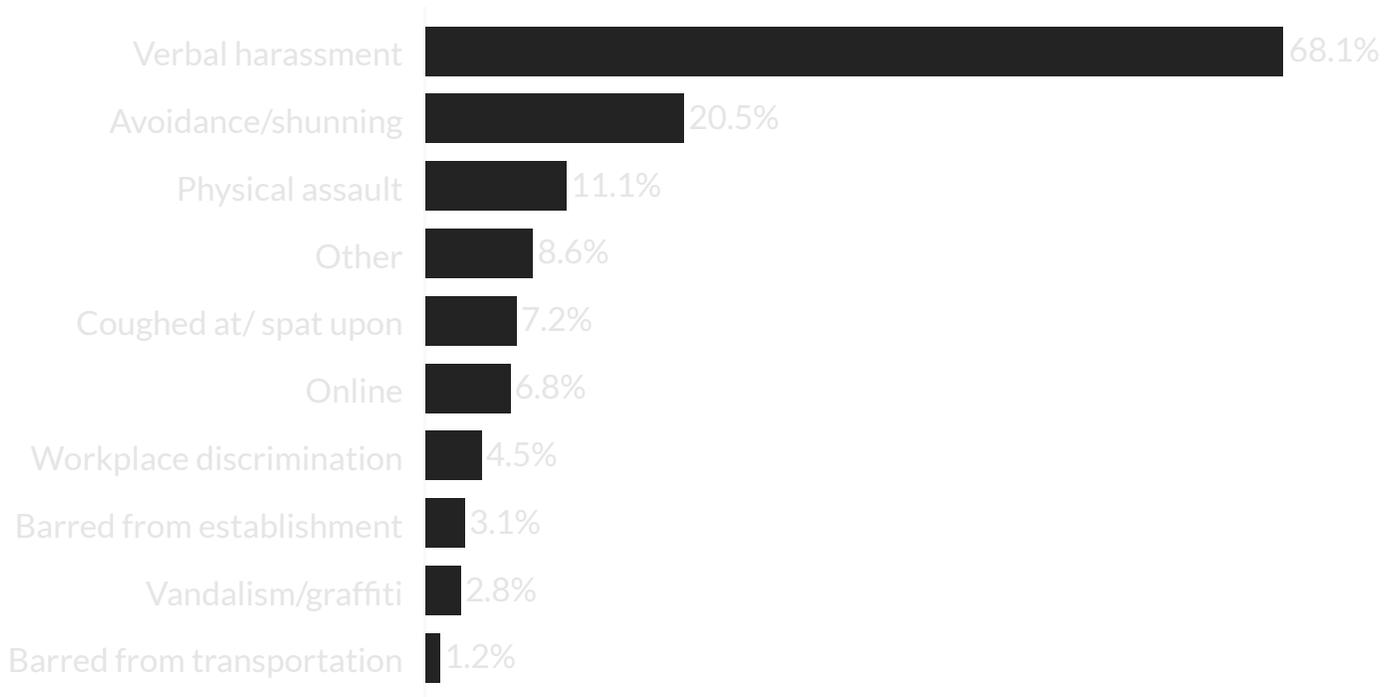
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# 3,195

## The number of hate incidents against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders tallied by Stop AAPI Hate between March 19, 2020 and Feb. 28, 2021

### Type of discrimination



### Site of discrimination

