

Mistreatment of African American Elders

This Research to Practice Brief synthesizes scholarship and research exploring the mistreatment of African American¹ elders in the United States. Despite the rise in the older African American population and attendant increase in elder abuse and neglect, mistreatment within communities of color remains largely hidden and under-detected. A corresponding scarcity in research has hindered comprehensive assessment of the nature and extent of the phenomenon. Of the existing literature, it is clear that institutional racism across the lifespan and correlates of economic deprivation, social injustice, and health disparities expose older African Americans to a greater risk of abuse. Within the African American community, sociocultural values, beliefs, and traditions impact the ways in which elder mistreatment is defined, understood, and reported. Effective prevention and treatment of abused elders requires competent and culturally literate services, resources, education, and awareness.²

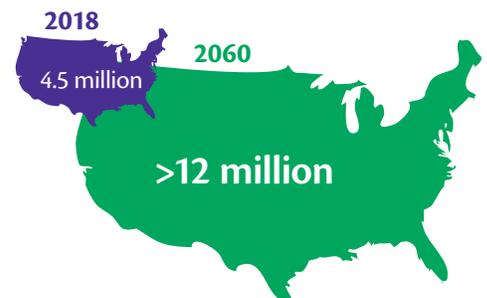
KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The legacy of slavery, structural racism, forced segregation, and the impact of ongoing oppressions contribute to systemic inequity and marginalization which increase older African Americans' susceptibility to abuse
- Ethnocultural perceptions and sensitivities impact how mistreatment is defined, described, and addressed by African American elders
- African American elders' conceptions of their capacity to access safety and healing through systems-based responses is multilayered, tainted by their experience of oppression and racial and complex traumas
- Understanding how the African American community conceptualizes abuse is essential to developing culturally relevant adult protections and abuse interventions
- Federal funding and legislation are needed to advance better understanding of cultural diversity and issues of elder mistreatment in the African American community

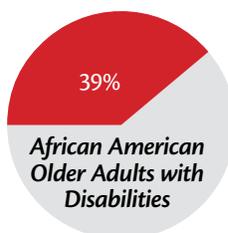
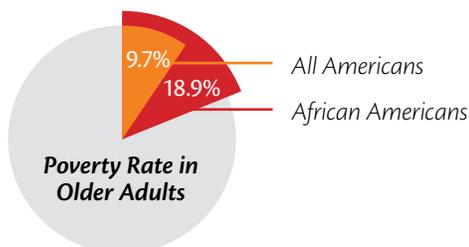
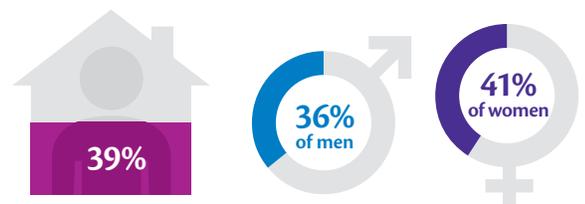
Demographics

- In 2018, there were approximately **4.5 million African Americans aged 65 and above** in the United States, comprising 9% of the older population
- By 2060, the African American cohort is expected to **grow to over 12 million**, constituting 13% of the elder population
- The **poverty rate in 2018 for African Americans age 65 and older was 18.9%**, nearly double the rate of 9.7% for all older Americans
- As of 2017, **39% of older African Americans had one or more disabilities**
- In 2018, **39% of African Americans aged 65 and over lived alone** (36% of men and 41% of women)^{3,4}

African Americans Older Adults in the United States



African Americans Older Adults Living Alone



DEFINITIONS OF MISTREATMENT

- Standardized definitions of abuse must be informed by the respective diverse **historical, experiential, and cultural lenses** among communities of color.⁵
- Notwithstanding cross-cultural variations in perspectives of abuse, studies have found **high levels of consistency across diverse communities** in identifying scenarios that constitute abuse or the risk of mistreatment.⁶
- African Americans and Caucasians have been found to **share similar views** of the causes of elder abuse.⁷



Historical Oppression and Institutional Racism

The unprecedented sociohistorical experience of slavery and transgenerational discrimination in its aftermath have produced economic, health, and social justice inequities within the African American community. For older African Americans at the intersection of racism, ageism, and sexism, multiple forms of oppression lead to compounding trauma.⁸ These systemic harms proximately contribute to the etiology of mistreatment, hinder accessibility to appropriate resources, and impact the efficacy of societal interventions.⁹ The cumulative burden of discrimination across the lifespan further exposes elders to heightened physical and mental health hardships.¹⁰ Past mistreatments resulting in polyvictimization can both precipitate and exacerbate debilities in later life.¹¹

Community Perceptions

Perceptions of elder mistreatment are often culturally construed and contextually determined.¹² Social frames and circumstantial factors influence how older adults from different racial and ethnic backgrounds define, experience, report, and respond to mistreatment.¹³ Individual preferences and objectives similarly impact the appraisal and relative acceptability of offending behavior as serious, actionable, or benign.



African American populations may be **more likely to view situations as abusive** when compared to other ethnic groups.¹⁴



Some African American elders subjected to abuse and oppression **may endure mistreatment** to preserve familial ties, satisfy caregiving needs, and avoid nursing home placement.¹⁵



Fear of institutionalization is particularly strong among older African Americans, many of whom identified nursing facilities as a source of mistreatment and endorsed a willingness to withstand abuse by family rather than live in a facility.¹⁶

Sociocultural norms may act as a buffer to deter abuse and exploitation, they may perpetuate structural inequalities and facilitate mistreatment, or they may have no impact on individual attitudes regarding mistreatment.¹⁷

RISK FACTORS

Among the general population, several risk factors have consistently been found to expose older adults to an increased threat of abuse. These factors are equally applicable to elders in underserved populations. They include functional deficits, cognitive impairment, social isolation, and limited economic resources.¹⁸ Perpetrator dependence on an elder, substance abuse, and criminal history may also heighten the likelihood of mistreatment. Ageism, endemic in social institutions, contributes to misperceptions of elder capabilities and is also causally related to abuse.¹⁹ Multiple intersecting forms of oppression borne of sustained systemic racism, ageism, classism, and sexism collectively incite elder susceptibilities to abuse. Additional factors specific to the African American experience increase the threat of elder mistreatment.²⁰

- Systematic oppression and discrimination create power imbalances and reinforce stereotypes that have put marginalized African Americans at an increased risk of abuse and exploitation.²¹
- Exposure to racism and segregation across the lifespan adds to the accumulated stress experienced by African Americans, substantially impacting overall health and increasing the risk of chronic disease and provoking greater susceptibility to abuse.²²
- Health disparities and economic hardships mediated by many African American families in the shadow of institutional racism place elders at greater risk.^{23,24}
- The burdens of informal caregiving within African American families contribute to both caregiver distress and elder vulnerabilities which foster a brittle balance and receptive host to mistreatment.²⁵
- African American mistrust of historically discriminatory law enforcement and governmental institutions compromises the community's ability to report abuse and seek helping resources.²⁶
- The inequitable distribution of health care, social services, and economic resources to communities of color compounds challenges and limits access to appropriate supports for older African Americans.²⁷
- The shortage of culturally relevant supports and community services has damped the efficacy of available interventions.²⁸
- The lingering traumas of slavery manifested biologically across generations at the cellular and molecular levels may attenuate or exacerbate responsiveness to abuse-related stressors.²⁹
- Older African Americans are more likely to live in neighborhoods that are poor, under-served, and beset by violent crime, exposing them to increased harm and greater susceptibility to mistreatment.³⁰
- Modernized and urbanized communities have led to eroding traditions and degraded respect for older adults heightening vulnerabilities.³¹

Protective Factors

Within the larger community of older adults, protective measures to prevent abuse have been identified. These include increased social supports, the presence of cohesive communities, access to justice, adequate health care, greater abuse awareness, and education and training on elder abuse.³² Reserves of strength and support specific to African American families have been found effective as well.



COMMUNITY

African Americans have a prominent tradition of **embracing community networks**, including extended family, neighbors, church, and service organizations, which have provided them with a sense of belonging, support, and safety through historical challenges.



SPIRITUALITY

Religious affiliations have been an important source of **strength and a protective buffer** during times of distress, providing support to both African American elders and their caregivers.



FAMILY

Family **loyalty and unity** has long been a source of resilience to African Americans through transgenerational oppression and maltreatment.



RESPECT FOR OLDER ADULTS

Older adults are revered within the African American community, admired for their **wisdom, strength, and dignity**.



VALUE OF MOTHERHOOD

African American mothers are recognized as **protectors of the family** and respected for the fortitude and support they provide to their kin.³³

AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILIES

Common attributes among many African American families may variously serve as sources of strength and stability or trigger dissent and maltreatment. Characteristics include:



Multigenerational and extended family networks



Flexible roles within families



Shared financial and familial responsibilities³⁴



Utilization of informal supports³⁵

Help-Seeking Behavior

- A strong sense of filial and community loyalty underlies African Americans' reluctance to publicly disclose and report intra-family elder abuse. Older adults, protective of family member abusers, are disinclined to expose them to criminal justice and potential imprisonment. These practices suggest a tendency to under-report harms and explains the unwillingness to acknowledge offenses reported by others.³⁶
- Historically discriminatory law enforcement practices have led African Americans to distrust authorities and question their ability to render much needed, culturally appropriate services and redress mistreatment. More often, African American elders prefer to utilize informal networks of support that have attained community acceptance.³⁷

Significant Research Findings

- Though ethnic minority status has been cited as a risk factor for elder mistreatment, study data has not supported significant race-based differences in the prevalence of abuse. Researchers found that modifiable risk factors of **poor health and social support** were determined to be predictive of mistreatment among all groups surveyed.³⁸
- Differences have been found in the prevalence of various types of mistreatment among groups.³⁹ Compared with non-African Americans, African American older adults may be at **increased risk of financial exploitation and psychological abuse**.⁴⁰
- One study found that African Americans were **three times more likely to report financial mistreatment** and **four times more likely to report psychological abuse** than non-African Americans.⁴¹
- Race, ethnicity, age, gender, cultural beliefs and values, and contextual factors converge to increase the risk of elder mistreatment.⁴²
- Along with physical abuse, verbal abuse was the most frequently identified form of abuse for African Americans.⁴³
- Older African Americans reported less psychological abuse related-upset than non-African Americans in a study survey regarding the **impact of yelling and threats to hit or throw something**.⁴⁴



Caregiving

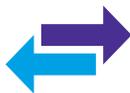
The remnants of slavery and forced segregation that have fomented economic and health disparities have sown discontent among many African Americans subjected to hardship. Family members, in particular, beholden to care for aging relatives, often find themselves frustrated with the demands of caregiving yet economically tethered to those for whom services are provided. They may be beleaguered by the scant resources to develop competent caregiving skills and the lack of access to professional resources. Older adults reliant on this informal family support are correspondingly discouraged by their increasing dependency, social isolation, and diminished exposure to external sources of engagement. The compounding stresses of this caregiving dyad may pose a significant risk of abuse.⁴⁵ On the other hand, it bears noting that studies have found that African American dementia caregivers generally exhibit greater psychological well-being than Caucasian dementia caregivers. Causal factors which contribute to this difference include higher levels of familism, community interdependence, and religiosity.⁴⁶

Theoretical Frameworks



SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY

The Social Exchange Theory has been posited to explain why overburdened caregivers mistreat or exploit dependent elders in their charge.⁴⁷ Caregivers may become resentful and abusive of dependent elders, who are increasingly more reliant on their services, if they believe that they are inadequately compensated for the care provided.



NEUTRALIZATION THEORY

The Neutralization Theory has been proffered by researchers to describe variations in victim appraisals of the perceived seriousness of offending conduct. Victims may rationalize abusive behavior and minimize the severity of the misconduct where the mistreatment is perpetrated by family caregivers mediating situational stress and the victim considers themselves to be burdensome.⁴⁸



ECOLOGICAL THEORY

The Ecological Theory has been applied to illuminate the multidimensional and interrelated contextual systems which impact the lives of African American elders and their caregivers, including influences that perpetuate discriminatory practices, create structural impediments to equity and justice, and portend abuse. The model also identifies protective elements of family support, cultural strengths, and resilience to address environmental challenges.⁴⁹

BARRIERS TO INTERVENTION

A constellation of factors operates to impede older African Americans' access to needed elder abuse protections. Beginning with the historical legacy of slavery in the United States and the cascading harms that have followed, African Americans have been subjected to generations of oppression and exploitation which have adversely impacted relief and redress from abuse.

- Reluctance of African American elders with cultural expectations of a strong family unit to denounce intra-family mistreatment.⁵⁰
- Older African Americans' reliance on informal family caregiving rather than formal supports and services.⁵¹
- Lack of culturally appropriate community services for diverse communities.⁵²
- Distrust of governmental authorities derived from years of oppressive interactions.⁵³
- Shortage of culturally and ethnically attuned health care providers.⁵⁴
- Unwillingness to report mistreatment to authorities given the history of negative encounters with the criminal justice system.⁵⁵
- Dearth of African American researchers to explore the prevalence, characteristics, and impact of elder mistreatment.⁵⁶
- Paucity of anti-racism scholarship and elder mistreatment research within communities of color.⁵⁷
- Lack of culturally valid and reliable research measures in underserved populations which has stifled efforts to assess cultural understandings of abuse, detection and reports of mistreatment, and the quality of interventions.⁵⁸
- Historical clinical and academic racism within the research community has led to the development of onerous protocols by university institutional review boards to prevent harm to "protected classes" of individuals, including those who are older, and ethnic minorities. The benevolent use of these boards to make research ethical and impactful has created barriers for researchers to elicit scientifically valid data in communities of color.⁵⁹

Proposed Interventions

Elder abuse is a pervasive public health issue, yet there are significant gaps in research, practice, education, and policy efforts to address this phenomenon. Representative longitudinal research is needed to better define, assess the prevalence, identify risk and protective factors, and appraise the consequences of mistreatment among diverse racial and ethnic populations. Effective practices must be buttressed by a federal, state, and community charge to develop culturally sound training and education and implement policy mandates to respond to the needs of the increasingly diverse older cohort.⁶⁰



RESEARCH

- Examine the individual, relational, societal, and institutional risk factors that predispose older African Americans to an increased risk of mistreatment and the protective factors which may mitigate, prevent, or redress harm.⁶¹
- Explore the influence of power and privilege dynamics on older African Americans subjected to multigenerational discrimination.⁶²
- Conduct community-based participatory research studies to better understand elder mistreatment in communities of color and develop culturally relevant preventions, aligning scholars from universities, health and social service providers, faith-based and community organizations, and key stakeholders in the research design, protocols, and process.⁶³
- Create qualitative sub-surveys using culturally appropriate and validated measures to glean a nuanced understanding of elder mistreatment in communities of color.⁶⁴
- Assess the variables impacting help-seeking behavior of African American elders, the consequences of reporting abuse, and mechanisms to encourage service utilization.⁶⁵
- Increase minority representation among the cadre of elder abuse researchers.⁶⁶
- Investigate the impact of systemic racism, including health, economic, and other contextual disparities on African American elders' transgenerational susceptibility to mistreatment.⁶⁷
- Consider whether existing theories can explain abuse in underserved communities or new theories need to be developed to better elucidate the unique dynamics within culturally diverse groups.⁶⁸
- Probe the cultural impact of older adults' perceptions of abuse and the contextual factors that impact those understandings.⁶⁹



PRACTICE

- Integrate cultural humility into health care, law enforcement, and social service practices to increase understanding of the relational systems and systemic inequalities that impact older adult lives, and use that knowledge to enhance the delivery of competent aid to elders who have been abused.⁷⁰
- Implement community-based programs to educate and improve filial caregiving practices, provide caregiver respite support to allay the burden of caregiving, and develop cultural acceptance and trust with professional caregiving services.⁷¹
- Develop and increase access to culturally informed interventions grounded in the intrinsic resilience and strength of the African American community, including money management education and services to protect against financial abuse.⁷²
- Increase social engagement, disseminate abuse prevention education, and conduct targeted screening and intervention through faith-based supports, local churches, community centers, and social networks.⁷³
- Expand multidisciplinary teams to improve the response to elder mistreatment in underserved communities by promoting cultural awareness among the diverse team members, increasing directed access to resources, and enhancing the quality of care for older adults.⁷⁴
- Facilitate the design and delivery of trauma-informed abuse prevention, mitigation, and recovery for elders who have been abused⁷⁵ through a holistic lens that embraces the history of oppression, remnants of structural exclusion, and effects of polyvictimization.⁷⁶



EDUCATION

- Develop culturally appropriate education and training for healthcare professionals, law enforcement personnel, protective service agencies, and others who have contact with older adults to alleviate factors that exacerbate abuse and enhance protective measures to prevent recurrence.⁷⁷



POLICY

- Enact federal legislation to advance understanding of cultural diversity and issues of elder mistreatment in minority communities.⁷⁸
- Increase funding to support research, training, and education that improves the cultural competence of service providers and researchers.⁷⁹
- Increase funding for research on aging in diverse communities.⁸⁰

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¹In this context, the phrase “African American” refers to the descendants of Africans enslaved in America.

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⁴<https://acl.gov/aging-and-disability-in-america/data-and-research/profile-older-americans>

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Mistreatment of Latinx Older Adults

GLOSSARY OF COMMONLY USED TERMS

- **Comunidad** – community; interrelations with those who share common culture, customs and personal interests
- **Familia** – the family; a cohesive unit
- **Machismo** – pride in being male; virility; masculinity
- **Marianismo** – matriarchy; a household lead by a female role; femininity; family caretaker
- **Promotores** – advocates that act on behalf of an older adult whose goal is to provide prevention or intervention services and resources (often times from a community based setting)
- **Vergüenza** – shame, embarrassment or humiliation

Note that due to many different dialects of the Spanish language, the terms used in this fact sheet may be interpreted differently in each country. Several terms have been identified that have interchangeable meanings such as: abuse & mistreatment as well as perpetrator & abuser.

KEY TAKEAWAYS: *Mistreatment of Latinx Older Adults*

- Culture can be a protective or risk factor for Latinx older adults. It has an impact on perceived risk and engagement in resources. Which in turn, affects intervention strategies for professionals from advocacy agencies, social workers, and law enforcement.
- Making assumptions regarding behaviors based on cultural heritage increases risk of stigma. If you want to understand cultural values, ask!
- **La familia** is emphasized over the individual in many Latinx cultures. Thus, perception of risk to the family unit decreases likelihood to report mistreatment or seek supportive services.
- The utilization of **promotores** is a culturally informed method of intervention that can be employed with survivors of mistreatment.
- Often interdependency is a norm in Latinx families, thus financial exploitation may be overlooked.
- **Vergüenza** to self and family, may also play a role in an older adult's engagement in reporting and utilization of resources.
- Lack of culturally competent services, language barriers, and lack of awareness of services.
- Sociocultural factors that include the intersection of immigration status and levels of acculturation should be taken into consideration.



LA FAMILIA



PROMOTORES



VERGÜENZA

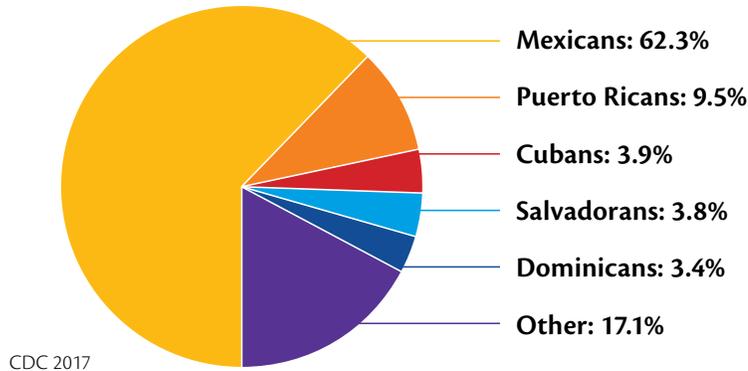


This **RESEARCH BRIEF** synthesizes the latest available information and research relating to the mistreatment of Latinx older adults, providing insight into general cultural beliefs, views, norms, of Latinx communities and how they relate to and influence elder mistreatment.

Statistics

The term **Latinx** is a gender-neutral neologism, sometimes used instead of Latino or Latina, to refer to people of Latin American cultural or ethnic identity in the United States. Latinx cultures reviewed here include Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race. They are the nation's largest ethnic minority and account for about 17% of the total US population.¹ Hispanic can be interpreted as an ethnic term acknowledging cultural ties back to Spanish heritage. Latino refers to Latin American decent blending Native American, African and Spanish heritage.²

LATINO POPULATION SUBGROUPS & STATISTICS

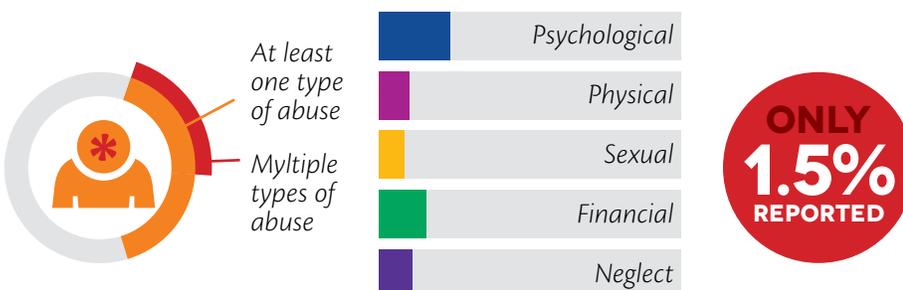


Research Findings on Prevalence

Due to the limited number of studies of elder mistreatment in the Latino population as well as study design variations, it is difficult to estimate an exact prevalence rate. A study of a nationally representative sample of older adults, found that Latinos were less likely to report both verbal and financial mistreatment than their White counterparts.³

TYPES OF ABUSE REPORTED

A study that specifically looked at 198 Latinx older adults, found that **40% experienced at least one type of abuse** and **21% experienced multiple types**.⁴ Among those who had experienced mistreatment, nearly **25% reported psychological abuse**, **10.7% reported physical abuse**, **9% reported sexual abuse**, **16.7% reported financial exploitation**, and **11.7% reported caregiver neglect**. Despite the high rates of reported mistreatment, only **1.5% of respondents indicated they had reported abuse of any kind** to Adult Protective Services (APS) in the past year.



TIPS TO PROVIDING CULTURALLY COMPETENT SERVICES TO LATINX FAMILIES

Culture, along with factors such as language barriers, fear of authorities, and living arrangements impact how older adults perceive mistreatment, their knowledge of support services, and willingness to report mistreatment and engage in recovery resources.

Make no assumptions – the elder is the expert on their own culture and beliefs. Steps to consider when assessing mistreatment of Latinx older adults.

1. Explore the survivor's degree of collective self or commitment to the abuser (e.g. how much of their resources do they share and how do they feel about it).
2. Review with the older adult the cultural context of mistreatment (e.g. how older adult is perceived or treated, what is culturally acceptable and unacceptable).
3. Assess the likelihood of reception to outside intervention. For example, an outside practitioner may bring *vergüenza* to the victim and the *familia*.
4. Observe subtle behaviors that are indicative of psychological abuse and neglect.

Cultural Values and Risk Factors

Familism emphasizes that the need of the family unit supersedes the need of individual family members. This value of *la familia* can have its benefits but can also create certain risk factors for older adults.



RISK FACTORS

1) Favoring a Family Caregiver and In-Home Care

- High levels of interdependence: Language barriers, lack of financial resources, limited insurance, and isolation⁵

2) Help-Seeking Behavior

- Unaware of the option of reporting abuse anonymously⁶
- Fear of a retaliation from an abuser⁷
- Concerned that they will not be treated with respect by professionals⁸
- Feeling the need to defend the family member abuser⁹
- Fear that reporting will lead to incarceration, which is stigmatized due to poor experiences with law enforcement, resulting in a sense of distrust¹⁰
- The Latino elder may not want to be brought to a place where prosecution is inevitable, because it may impact la familia¹¹

3) History of Domestic Violence

- Experience with domestic violence, physical or sexual abuse before age 65¹²
- More likely to be victims of intimate partner violence compared to Whites¹³

4) Machismo

- Strongly linked to domestic violence¹⁴
- If a male elder is being mistreated, he may not want to reveal the loss of respect and status expected in his position¹⁵
- Plays a role in self-neglect by prioritizing the needs of the family above their own as a sacrifice they made for their family members¹⁶

5) Acculturation

- The disconnectedness from cultural identity can influence family roles and affect traditional values¹⁷

REPORTING BEHAVIOR

- Caregivers who identified as “Mexican-American” as opposed to “Hispanic” said that people in their culture would be less likely to report abuse, even though many were more cognizant of abuse.¹⁸
- However, one study showed that most Puerto Ricans would contact authorities if an elderly person was mistreated by a family member.¹⁹
- Immigrants considerably underreport mistreatment due to the family’s preference to seek resolution on their own. Involvement of authorities is feared to cause harm to not only the victim but also the family.²⁰



Perception of Mistreatment

PSYCHOLOGICAL

- **62.5% of Puerto Rican respondents considered psychological neglect** (e.g., excluding from activities, isolation) **among the worst things** that can be done to an elderly person by a family member.

ACTS OF AGGRESSION AND PHYSICAL ABUSE

- A Latina elder who is abused may believe that she should have the ability to endure abuse and that violent partnerships are commonplace. A Latina abuser may become abusive because she takes on more responsibilities than she can handle.²¹ Abusive marital relationships may be precipitated by gender role expectations of marianismo, mandating women to tolerate abuse and focus on serving others, economic dependence, and societal expectations disapproving of marital dissolutions.²²

EMOTIONAL ABUSE AND NEGLECT

- Deliberate acts of aggression, such as, taking money without permission and striking or yelling at elders were also perceived to be forms of mistreatment.²³ Refusing to provide basic and emotional needs of Latino elders has been reported as one of the most frequent forms of elder abuse.²⁴

FINANCIAL ABUSE

- Latino elders often do not identify financial abuse as a form of mistreatment and may not consider providing adult children or grandchildren with money or other resources to be exploitative.²⁵ Many financial exchanges are rooted in familial and cultural expectations of support for *la familia* and *la comunidad* at large.²⁶

LONG-TERM CARE

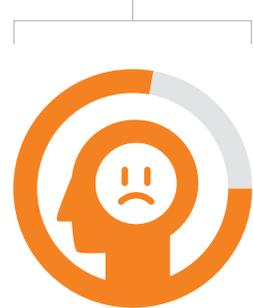
- Caregivers may be misinformed about what constitutes abuse. One study found that some caregivers believed physical abuse to be the only reportable type of mistreatment.²⁷
- Latinas identified putting an elderly relative in a nursing home as being an abusive act.²⁸ In the study of Mexican-American caregivers, **78% indicated they would feel guilty if they did not care for an older relative in need** and **57.8% thought that it was assumed that the women would care for aging relatives in their families.**²⁹

Puerto Rican respondents



Considered psychological neglect among the worst things that can be done to an elderly person

Mexican-American Caregivers



Would feel guilty if they did not care for an older relative



Assumed that women would care for aging relatives

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Mistreatment of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Elders

This research brief synthesizes the latest available information and research relating to the mistreatment of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) elders. This brief focuses on the intersection of culture and elder mistreatment in AAPI communities. Information is provided on perceptions and prevalence of elder mistreatment, help seeking behavior, and recommendations for research and intervention.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- In many AAPI cultures, the family or group is emphasized over the individual, which can affect an elder's willingness to report abuse. This can be understood through the strong cultural value of **filial piety**.
- The AAPI community is often stereotyped as the "**model minority**" but little is understood about elder abuse in this community and more research is needed on AAPI subpopulations.
- **Psychological/emotional abuse** is the most commonly reported form of elder abuse in this community and it is defined in a way that differs from Western culture.
- There may be a **high tolerance for financial exploitation** in this community.
- **Reporting of elder abuse** is low in this community due to reasons like language barriers, considering elder mistreatment a family matter, and shame.
- Acculturation, length of time in the U.S., and place of birth may influence attitudes and behaviors related to elder abuse among AAPI elders.
- Recommendations for addressing elder abuse in this community include collecting indirect and disaggregated data, tailoring programs to culturally defined forms of mistreatment, and reframing traditional values to encourage elder abuse detection.

Demographics

Asian Americans trace their roots to more than 20 countries in East and Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent, each with unique histories, cultures, languages and other characteristics.¹ The U.S. Census Bureau provides the following definitions for Asian and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.

Asian: *A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.*

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander: *A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.*



In 2019, approximately **22.4 million persons designated their race as Asian** or Asian in combination with one or more other races and the Asian community made up 5.7% of those aged 60 and over in the U.S. Approximately **1.4 million persons designated their race as Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander** alone or in combination with one or more other races in 2019 and the Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander community made up 0.2% of those aged 60 and over.²



The single-race, non-Hispanic segment of the U.S. Asian population is the nation's fastest-growing racial or ethnic group; projected to reach 46 million by 2060.¹

46 MILLION

U.S. Asian population by 2060

About **a quarter of Asian Americans (27%) live in multigenerational households.**¹



27% of Asian Americans live in multigenerational households

DISCRIMINATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

When discussing the AAPI community, it is important to note the recent increase in hate incidents targeting Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic. Stop AAPI Hate, a national coalition addressing anti-Asian racism across the U.S., reported approximately 6,603 Asian American and Pacific Islander hate incident reports from March 2020 to March 2021. These included verbal harassment and shunning, physical assault, civil rights violations, and online harassment. **More seniors (60 years old and older) reported hate incidents in 2021**, increasing from 6.3% in 2020 to 7.0% in 2021.³



Background

MODEL MINORITY MYTH

Stereotyped as the “**model minority**”, the AAPI are often viewed as the highest-income, best-educated racial group in the country, with few, if any, needs.⁴ In aggregate, AAPI older adults face lower levels of poverty as compared to other minority counterparts. However, within certain AAPI subpopulations, poverty rates are extremely high.⁵ In addition, AAPI elders worry about language barriers making them more susceptible to fraud and abuse.⁴



MODEL MINORITY MYTH

FILIAL PIETY

Research suggests that an Asian elder's primary approach to elder mistreatment or conflict-related family problems seems to strongly adhere to the concept of **filial piety**, which emphasizes the family or group over the individual and discourages seeking help from strangers or outsiders to the family.⁶



FILIAL PIETY

LACK OF RESEARCH

Despite the fact that AAPIs are the fastest growing groups of ethnic elderly in the country, AAPI needs are **not well researched** and relatively few programs and services are designed for their unique needs.⁵ Asian older adults face barriers in participating in research due to linguistic and cultural issues. There are also significant systemic research pipe-line barriers to support research about Asian populations and research led by Asian investigators.⁷ Very little information is available regarding elder mistreatment in these communities, particularly disaggregated research.⁴



LACK OF RESEARCH

SOCIOCULTURAL FACTORS IN ASSESSING RISK OF ELDER ABUSE

Risk assessments often fail to consider sociocultural factors particularly relevant to AAPI older adults, such as:



Prioritization of family harmony over self



Immigration and levels of acculturation



Cultural norms
(e.g. transferring wealth to one's children)



Cultural behaviors
(e.g. silence)



View of endurance and suffering as cultural virtues

These sociocultural factors lead to invisibility and may make AAPI older adults more susceptible and less likely to report elder abuse.⁴

Perceptions of Elder Abuse

DISRESPECT AS A FORM OF ELDER ABUSE

It is evident that AAPI elders identify culturally specific forms of mistreatment that would not necessarily be deemed abusive from a western perspective. For instance, the concept of “disrespect” captures actions and attitudes that violate basic Asian cultural norms.⁹

HIGH TOLERANCE FOR FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION

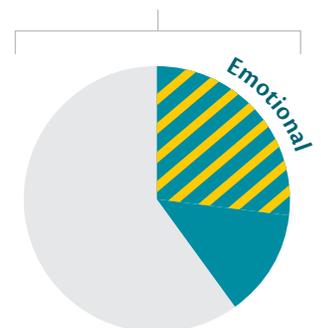
While many Asian cultures consider disrespect to be a serious form of elder abuse, their elders may show a high tolerance for financial exploitation.⁹ One study on the perceptions of elder financial abuse among elders in California found that Asian-American (and Latino) participants were less likely to perceive the signing over of property as financial abuse when compared to Caucasian participants.¹⁰

Findings In AAPI Communities

PREVALENCE AND COMMON FORMS OF MISTREATMENT

A study of AAPI adults aged 55 and older found that out of 60 participants, **40% reported having experienced at least one type of elder mistreatment with emotional mistreatment being the most frequently reported type.** Approximately **27% of the 60 participants reported experiencing at least one form of emotional mistreatment** within the prior 12 months, including feeling humiliated, feeling ignored, verbal mistreatment, and feeling harassed or coerced.¹¹ Psychological abuse that includes verbal abuse, emotional abuse, and psychological neglect might be the most prevalent and recognized form of elder mistreatment among AAPI elders.⁶

Prevalence of Elder Mistreatment



HELP SEEKING

Inherent to many AAPI cultures is the tendency not to speak up about the challenges that they face, as **many AAPI older adults and families do not want to be a “burden,” are hesitant to complain, and have a strong sense of pride in being capable of self-managing.**⁴ AAPI elders are less likely to seek formal types of elder mistreatment services such as Adult Protective Services (APS) or an elder abuse hotline.⁶ **They are more likely to use informal social networks such as family members, friends, or ethnic churches as their primary source of help.**^{6,9}



A study of 60 AAPI older adults reported several findings on help seeking behavior¹¹:

- 65% and 63% of the older adults reported that they were likely to contact APS if they ever encountered **physical mistreatment and neglect**, respectively. Over half reported that they would consider contacting APS if they were experiencing **financial mistreatment** (58%). A lower percentage of participants reported that they would be likely to contact APS in case of **emotional mistreatment** (48%). Study participants were more willing to seek help from APS if they encountered **sexual mistreatment** than any other type of mistreatment (77%). 38% of the respondents reported that they would be either 'very unlikely' or 'unlikely' to seek help from APS for any type of mistreatment.
- Reasons for not seeking APS services included having English language barriers, feeling uncomfortable in reporting private problems to the third party, considering elder mistreatment as a family matter, and preferring private sources of help such as family, friends, and religion.
- While a large number of participants considered seeking help from APS, the majority of them chose family members as their top preferred resource for help if they encountered elder mistreatment (72%).
- 63% reported that they did not know know an organization or a professional to turn to if they were being abused or mistreated. Those who did know of professional resources identified ethnic specific service agencies, police or 911, churches or pastors, and APS.

Likelihood to contact APS by type of mistreatment



DIFFERENCES BETWEEN U.S. BORN AND FIRST-GENERATION AAPI ELDERERS

A study of four groups of AAPI elders (n = 273) found significant differences between U.S.-born Chinese and Japanese Americans and first generation Korean and Taiwanese Americans in regards to their tolerance for elder mistreatment, tendency to victim blame, and attitudes toward reporting. Large percentages (40%-50%) of "don't know" and "it depends" responses from the participants for some of the statements about elder abuse indicated that the respondents had difficulty relating to the phenomenon of elder mistreatment.¹²

ELDER MISTREATMENT STATEMENTS	U.S. BORN	BORN OUTSIDE OF U.S.
<i>Agreed that it is okay for adult children to yell occasionally at their elderly parents</i>	Chinese: 30% Japanese: 21%	Korean: 8% Taiwanese: 5%
<i>Agreed that it is okay for an adult child to use his/her elderly parent's money for himself/herself</i>	Chinese: 10% Japanese: 8%	Korean: 45% Taiwanese: 13%
<i>Agreed that many elderly people are badly treated because they did something wrong to deserve it</i>	Chinese: 6% Japanese: 6%	Korean: 43% Taiwanese: 11%
<i>In favor of persons outside the family getting involved when an elderly person is abused or neglected by a family member</i>	Chinese: 62% Japanese: 62%	Korean: 70% Taiwanese: 54%
<i>In favor of reporting elder abuse to authorities when an elderly person is abused or neglected by a family member</i>	Chinese: 90% Japanese: 77%	Korean: 68% Taiwanese: 68%



Filipino and Korean Elders

A study of attitudes toward elder abuse among Filipino and Korean elderly women (n = 20) in Hawaii found that the two groups had similar perceptions of what was abusive. Results were compared to a previous study in Minnesota that used the same elder abuse scenarios and it was found that responses from Korean and Filipino participants in Hawaii were more similar to Caucasians and African-Americans in the Minnesota sample, than to Koreans in Minnesota; the average percentage of respondents who perceived the scenarios as abusive was 66% for Koreans and 69% for Filipinos compared to 73% for African Americans, 67% for Caucasians, and 50% for Koreans in Minnesota. While only 9% of Korean-Minnesotan respondents would seek help from formal sources, the overall average percentages for the other two Minnesota groups and the two Hawaii groups ranged from 25%-41%. Differences in acculturation, length of time in the U.S., and the availability of family networks are possible explanations for the difference in responses between Koreans in Minnesota and the Hawaii sample.¹³



Vietnamese Elders

A study of Vietnamese elders (n = 20) in the U.S. found that emotional abuse was the most prevalent form of abuse reported, followed by verbal abuse. The typical elder abuse victim was a female over age 60, recently settled in the U.S., did not speak English and was unfamiliar with Western culture, usually in good health, living in a multigenerational household, and financially dependent on her children. The typical abuser was a daughter-in-law who usually works outside the home and has young children at home. The study found that victims hesitate to ask for help for fear of: losing those family members who offer vital assistance to them, bringing shame to the family, and incurring additional abuse if they speak up.¹⁴



Asian Indian Elders

- Historically, Asian Indian elders have held unique and honored positions within their family. However, the changing social landscape has impacted their role.^{15,16}
- In the Indian context, older people customarily perceive the word ‘abuse’ to mean extreme behavior of violence but not neglect/abandonment. However, in qualitative studies, older people have acknowledged the existence of maltreatment and neglect within their society.¹⁶
- One study found that elder abuse showed a negative association with the mental health of older Asian Indian adults, especially among women.¹⁶



Japanese Elders

- A study of 146 Japanese adults (ages 19-60) found that when generating examples of extreme abuse, participants most frequently gave examples of various forms of physical aggression. Economic abuse was seen as abusive only at the moderate level.¹⁷
- Traditionally, Japan’s strong emphasis on filial responsibility assured care for the elderly, and much of Japanese social interaction continues to be tied into social obligation.¹⁷



Korean Elders

Korean norms dictate that children should respect, obey, and engage with their parents in a polite and respectful manner. As the parents age, sons especially are expected to care for the parents physically, emotionally and financially in a willing manner. In turn, the parents share their income and savings as if equal access to their funds by their children is expected. In addition, the elder’s tolerance for financial abuse may be related to the traditional patriarchal property transfer system in Korean society. Under this system, sons, even after marriage, enjoy exclusive family inheritance rights.¹²



Malaysian Elders

- In the 2018 National Health and Morbidity Survey the most frequently reported type of abuse perpetrated against Malaysian elders was neglect. It also found that close to 30% of abused elders did not report their suffering to anyone.¹⁸
- Another study found that the reporting of abuse was scant in this community, with only a third of those screening positive for abuse informing someone. Of those who did report (n = 87), the majority (65%) reached out to police officers. Among those who said they had not reported (n = 29), the reasons for not reporting were: (1) did not want to implicate family members (57%); (2) did not feel it is an abuse or neglect (25%); (3) did not know where to seek help (16%); and (4) felt ashamed (2%). **The researchers noted that evidence from studies in other Asian communities like Hong Kong, India, and Korea revealed a number of similar reasons for under-reporting.**¹⁹



Nepalese Elders

A study of Nepalese older adults found that out of 158 participants, 96% had heard about abuse of older persons and **47% were suffering from at least one form of elder abuse in the last six months.** The most common forms reported were neglect (35%), followed by showing disrespect (35%), verbal abuse (25%), economic abuse (8%), physical abuse (6%) and emotional abuse (5%). Men suffered more from elder abuse compared to women (55% to 28%) and elders who were suffering from some form of disease had a higher rate of elder abuse.²⁰



Filipino Elders

A study of Filipino older adults found that the kind of elder abuse experienced by participants were: (1) violation of human rights; (2) physical abuse; (3) financial abuse; (4) emotional baggage and damage; and (5) feeling alone and no support from others. Participants also mentioned that they were usually branded as 'liability', 'useless', 'unusable', and 'hopeless' due to their physical and mental limitations. All participants experienced discrimination due to their conservative practices. Filipino older persons were accustomed to traditional teachings, which were already obsolete. Common topics that were customarily debated were marriage, relationships, courting, lifestyles, superstitions, life perspectives, and principles. These arguments usually lead to disagreement, failure to appreciate the importance of elderly in the society, and lack of respect of young adults and children.²¹



Thai Elders

- A study of Thai elders found that the causes of elder abuse noted by participants could be categorized into two groups: (1) individual factors of older people (illness and poverty) and (2) individual factors of abusers (use of addictive substances, gambling addiction, etc.). Elders were hurt the most by the verbal abuse that was done by their own children. Respondents noted that psychological elder abuse can be caused by economic struggle and that financial abuse was most likely to be caused by family members. Female elderly were perceived as particularly at high risk of neglect and financial exploitation due to their lower social status, especially if widowed.²²
- A review of elder abuse findings in Thailand found that the most common form indicated was psychological or emotional abuse, ranging from 40% to 56%. Exploitation was the second most common. **Family relationship, substance abuse, and a negative attitude toward aging were noted as risk factors for elder abuse in this community.**²³

NOTE: Refer to the *Mistreatment of Chinese Elders* and *Mistreatment of Korean Elders* research briefs to learn more about elder abuse in these communities.

Tips For Working With AAPI Elders and Advancing Research

BE SENSITIVE TO DIFFERENT DEFINITIONS OF ELDER ABUSE

There may be a need to conceptually adjust current definitions of financial abuse to account for the complexity in how it is defined by different AAPI communities.^{24,25} Formal definitions may need to be considered more broadly according to different elderly minority groups given social and cultural contexts.²⁴



RESEARCH NEEDS

Recommended Research Strategies

Recommended strategies for expanding understanding of elder abuse in the AAPI community include:

- Using indirect estimates by asking participants to report abuse they have heard of or witnessed, an alternative to traditional research focused on personal experience.⁹
- Soliciting data not only from victims, but also from multiple informants such as perpetrators, ethnography observations, and facility-level or medical records to minimize threats to data validity owing to recall bias, recognition barriers, and reluctance for disclosure.²⁶
- Utilizing the community-based participatory research approach.^{25,27,28}
- Conducting longitudinal studies.^{9,28}
- Researching culturally appropriate interventions that can guide policymakers and social service organizations.⁶
- Utilizing disaggregated data collection methods to account for ethnic distinctions, cultural norms, traditions, and social and economic health needs among and between AAPI subpopulations.⁵

Areas Needing More Research

There is a strong need for research on the following areas:

- Subgroup differences in the experience and definition of elder abuse among diverse Asian ethnic groups^{29,24}
- Changing notions of family responsibility toward caregiving and its implications for elder mistreatment⁶
- Elder mistreatment in long-term care settings⁶
- Comparing the impacts of culturally specific forms of abuse with traditional types of abuse³⁰

SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT

An argument has often been that much of the screening and assessment instruments developed in Western societies may not be able to capture culture-specific forms of elder abuse in Asian cultures.³⁰ Recommendations for improving screening and measuring of elder abuse in the AAPI community include:

- Develop culturally sensitive instruments that will map culturally specific types of abuse while at the same time providing enough flexibility for comparison between multisite cross-cultural studies.⁹
- Develop gender-sensitive instruments for detecting elder mistreatment in minority older women.³¹
- Practitioners should keep in mind the diversity of beliefs and be sensitive to the possibility that their elderly Asian clients may be dealing with abusive behavior but will not reveal it due to self-blame feelings about the situation.³²
- Since an admission of being victimized may only occur only if the victims ascertain that the perpetrators and families will not be affected negatively, practitioners must explore the elder's degree of collective self or commitment to the perpetrator¹²





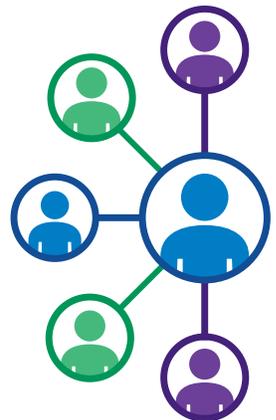
PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

Recommended strategies for preventing and addressing elder abuse in the AAPI community include:

- Mobilize victims' social networks, family, and friends to aid prevention and intervention efforts.⁹
- Tailor intervention programs and services to the types of the mistreatment under the specific cultural context.³³
- Provide counseling to families to help address their own perceptions of caregiver burden and stress and possibly help improve communication in multigenerational households.¹⁵
- Form close collaborations among AAPI service providers, community leaders, and APS.¹¹
- Social service providers and APS should actively reach out to AAPI communities, especially in disseminating APS program information.¹¹
- Maximize the victim's culture's potential power; when elders cite family loyalty as a reason not to stop the mistreatment, through reframing, practitioners and family members may emphasize the elders' obligation to admit to the mistreatment in order to obtain help for the perpetrators and to stop participating in the perpetuation of a tense atmosphere that is deleterious to all family members.³² Traditional values of filial piety and avoidance of shame can be reinterpreted in ways to encourage healthier behaviors such as therapeutic approaches that strengthen entire families without singling out individuals or assigning blame.¹³

SUCCESSFUL INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMS IN THE AAPI COMMUNITY

Intergenerational connections may be a promising approach to preventing intergenerational tension and conflict in AAPI communities, which could in turn help prevent mistreatment of AAPI elders. A study of two intergenerational programs that were developed by Asian American communities showed success in intergenerational learning and increased social connections. Observations showed learning by the younger generation on how to communicate with the older generation and learning to be patient. Community-driven programs are important because families cannot be counted on as the only resource to prevent isolation of older adults and because community-driven programs have the potential to contribute to more culturally appropriate and effective strategies to address societal issues.³⁴



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NOTE: * Indicates that the source is a peer-reviewed journal. Other pertinent sources (e.g. presentation, report, community research study) are also included in this review for informational purposes, even though they may not be peer-reviewed. The specific author(s) should be consulted regarding questions on their content, research and/or review process.

Mistreatment of Chinese Elders

This research brief synthesizes the latest available information and research relating to the mistreatment of Chinese older adults living in the United States, providing insight into general cultural beliefs, views, norms, of Chinese immigrant communities and how they relate to and influence elder mistreatment.



NOTE: The majority of research articles reviewed in this brief used a sample from the PINE study (Population-Based Study of Chinese Elderly), a community-engaged and population-based epidemiological study of Chinese older adults (over 60) in the Greater Chicago area.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Despite being referred to as the “model minority”, elder abuse is prevalent in the Chinese community.
- Core values of **filial piety** and **family harmony** profoundly shape the response to elder mistreatment among this population.
- Definitions of **psychological abuse** and **financial exploitation** in the Chinese community are unique compared to other populations.
- Experiences of immigration and acculturation shape an older Chinese immigrant’s experience of elder mistreatment.
- Intervention recommendations include involving family members in educational/support programs, improving communication between elders and adult children, emphasizing traditional cultural values, and increasing care and support for victims, especially women.

Background and Statistics

In 2018, there were an estimated **5.2 million individuals of Chinese descent** in the United States, making them the largest group within the Asian and Pacific Islander population.¹



THE “MODEL MINORITY” MYTH

Research findings of elder abuse among Chinese Americans challenge the so-called “**model minority**” stereotype by showing that violence is a prevalent and long lasting phenomenon among this community.²



MODEL MINORITY

Perceptions of Elder Mistreatment

FILIAL PIETY AND OTHER CORE CULTURAL VALUES

The value of **filial piety** is a key aspect of traditional Chinese Confucianism that is woven into Chinese culture. Filial piety emphasizes the importance of family cohesion and family obligation.² Core values of traditional culture, such as collectivism and family harmony, filial piety, marital and gender roles, spirituality, and social characteristics profoundly shape the norms and expectations regarding interpersonal and/or social interactions related to and in response to elder mistreatment within the Chinese community.³



FILIAL PIETY

Although older Chinese immigrants tend to be more culturally adapted, **many Chinese elders may be deeply affected by cultural norms of collectivism and family harmony which would emphasize group responsibility and sharing of financial resources with family members.**⁴ One study found that Chinese elders tend to tolerate conflicts within families such as “destroying your belongings,” “uncomfortable relationship,” and “verbal attack without causing serious emotional outcomes.”⁵



WHAT IS CONSIDERED ABUSIVE?

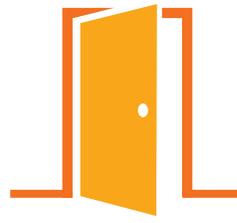
Behaviors that were considered to be abusive according to Chinese elders were:



No help while in need⁵



No contacts/indifference⁵



Forcing elderly parents to leave when grandchildren grew up³



Emotional abuse of an elderly parent using immigration status and fear of deportation³

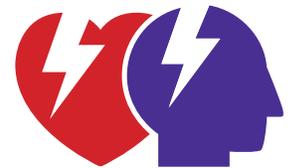
FAMILY EXPECTATIONS AND FINANCIAL ABUSE

Cultural norms of collectivism and family harmony might contribute to a Chinese elder’s vulnerability to exploitation.

Chinese elders in one study reported a tendency to support their adult children financially even after they have married and moved away. Participants from both groups also commonly reported the unauthorized use of their income or savings by their adult children and the unauthorized transfers of legal titles. Many immigrant elders relied on their children for things like managing bank accounts, using ATM cards, or receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security benefits. Such dependence might aggravate the elders’ vulnerability to exploitation. Although all participants considered the unauthorized use of an elderly person’s money by a non-family member to be exploitive and reportable, **elderly victims were less likely to report financial exploitation committed by a family member.**³

EMOTIONAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

Chinese participants in one study expressed that being disrespected and ignored by their adult children were the worst forms of psychological abuse they could face. **The most frequently described dimension of elder mistreatment was psychological or emotional abuse.** Many Chinese elders perceived being disrespected, ignored, or excluded particularly distressing and psychologically abusive. A unique form of psychological abuse identified by this community was the “silent treatment”, which was commonly perceived as an extreme form of psychological humiliation or punishment.³



IMMIGRATION-RELATED ABUSE AND SEXUAL ABUSE

Chinese participants in the same study referenced above expressed that **immigrant elders confronted additional forms of psychological, financial, and sexual abuse.**³ Chinese experts in the same study commented that identifying elder sexual abuse is especially challenging since it is a culturally taboo subject.³



Prevalence

Prevalence estimates of **elder abuse among the Chinese community range between 10.2% and 25.8%**, with a variation in definitions, geographic location, and sample size. Below is a summary of prevalence estimates.

SAMPLE SIZE	PREVALENCE OF ELDER ABUSE	SOURCE
266	10.2%	<i>Gao, Sun, & Hodge, 2019</i>
2,713	8.8%	<i>Dong & Wang, 2017</i>
3,159	25.8% (using least restrictive criteria) 13.9% (using the most restrictive criteria)	<i>Dong, 2014</i>
3,159	15.2%	<i>Wang & Dong, 2019</i>
3,159	15%	<i>Dong et al., 2014</i>

By Family Members

In a study of 266 Chinese elders, the prevalence of **elder abuse perpetrated by family members was 10.2%**.⁵

Older Chinese Women

In a study of 1,833 Chinese older women, **15.9% indicated suffering from some form of mistreatment**.⁶

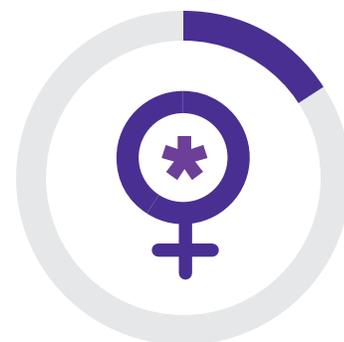
Prevalence of Elder Abuse



Among the Chinese community



By family members



Among women

FREQUENTLY REPORTED REPORTED FORMS OF ABUSE

The most frequently reported forms of abuse in the studies reviewed for this brief were:



Financial exploitation⁷



Feeling uncomfortable with someone in the family⁸



Psychological⁹



Caregiver neglect⁴

Protective Factors



Social Support: One study found that Chinese elders with higher levels of overall positive social support, positive social support from spouse, and positive social support from family members were found to be less likely to experience elder mistreatment.¹⁶



Tight-Knit Family Structure: A tight-knit type of family structure has been found to be a protective factor for elder mistreatment among Chinese immigrants whereas unobligated, ambivalent, and detached family types were associated with higher risks of elder mistreatment.¹⁷ Similarly, another study found that Chinese older adults lacking family cohesion were more likely to experience general elder mistreatment.⁵

RISK FACTORS

Age: A study of 266 Chinese elders found that younger age was associated with elder abuse.⁵ In contrast, another study found that the over-80 age group had the greatest odds of overall self-neglect across severities.¹⁰ Similarly, another study found that older age was associated with a higher risk for elder mistreatment.¹¹

Gender: One study found men were at greater risk of elder mistreatment and for financial exploitation.¹¹ In regards to caregiver neglect, a different study found that female gender is associated with increased risk.⁹

Education Level: One study reported that the lowest educated older adults had the lowest prevalence of moderately-defined elder mistreatment and all definitions of financial exploitation.¹¹

Income: One study found that older adults with the highest income levels had the highest prevalence of strictly-defined overall elder mistreatment and all definitions of financial exploitation.¹¹

Physical Impairment/Health Status: One study found that lower physical function was associated with greater risk of elder self-neglect.¹² Similarly, another study found a greater level of physical function impairment to be significantly associated with lower risk of elder mistreatment among Chinese elders.¹³

Duration of Residence in the U.S.: One study found that higher levels of acculturation were positively associated with elder abuse and emotional abuse.¹⁴ A different study also found that longer duration of residence in the U.S. was associated with increased risk of financial abuse.⁹

History of Child Abuse and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV): One study found that individuals with a history of child maltreatment were associated with 2 times higher odds of IPV and elder abuse, and those who had experienced IPV were associated with almost 6 times higher odds of elder abuse.¹⁵ Another study found that psychological elder abuse, physical/sexual elder abuse and financial exploitation were more prevalent among those who experienced child maltreatment and IPV.²

History of Depression: One study discovered that depressed Chinese elders are more likely to experience elder abuse, in line with previous studies on elder abuse in Mainland Chinese older adults.⁵



Effects of Elder Mistreatment

ANXIETY/DEPRESSION

One study found that participants who experienced any mistreatment were more likely to have anxiety and depressive symptoms than those who did not. Participants who experienced physical mistreatment had the highest odds of reporting anxiety. Caregiver neglect was associated with anxiety symptoms and depressive symptoms.⁴

MORTALITY & SUICIDAL IDEATION

Elder mistreatment is a risk factor for mortality over time among this population. One study found that moderate and severe elder mistreatment were significantly associated with risk of mortality over time. **Threats to send older adults to a nursing home or to abandon them were associated with greater risk of mortality than other types of psychological mistreatment.**

Caregiver neglect was also associated with significantly greater risk of mortality.¹⁸ Another study found that elder mistreatment was significantly associated with increased risk for suicidal ideation.¹⁹



Tips for Working With Chinese Elders and Advancing Research



Be Sensitive to Different Cultural Definitions of Elder Abuse

When assessing elder abuse among Chinese elders, particularly when assessing potential financial abuse situations, practitioners should be aware of how culture shapes definitions of such abuse.⁷



Recognize the Importance of Family Members

Given the important role of family in the Chinese community, healthcare professionals should integrate family participation into healthcare services to enhance the spousal and family positive support.¹⁸



A Potential Screening Tool

Gao and colleagues developed a **10-item elder mistreatment screening assessment tool** that is both culturally and linguistically appropriate and may aid Chinese older adults themselves, family members, and service professionals to quickly identify elder mistreatment among Chinese elders. Future research may use the screening assessment tool and replicate the study in other locations.⁵



Intervention Recommendations

The following intervention strategies have been recommended for protecting Chinese elders: :

- Provide services entailing improved communication, understanding, and relationship building between aging parents in Chinese communities and their adult children's families.³
- Focus on increasing help-seeking behaviors among Chinese communities through the alleviation of negative consequences (e.g., arrest of abusive family member, deportation), reduction of stigma, and the promotion of education on reporting and advocacy.³
- Include family members in both educational programs and support groups to understand the cultural needs of elder parents.^{5,8}
- Develop interventions that emphasize the assets of the culture while helping participants identify risks.⁵ For example, more workshops or other educational opportunities could be offered to foster the Chinese traditional cultural value of "revering elders and caring the young."²⁰ Programs could focus on building "bi-cultural" identities among older adults and their adult children and could promote filial piety, which may have a protective effect against elder mistreatment.²⁰
- Increase support and care for older adults who have been mistreated so as to prevent suicidal ideation arising from elder mistreatment.¹⁹
- Reduce caregiver burden and promote home care services to reduce caregiver neglect.¹¹
- Provide special attention to elder mistreatment in older women and be aware of their heightened risk for suicidal ideation.^{6,19} Gender-based interventions such as women's counseling groups could be designed to provide support and empowerment.⁶

RESEARCH NEEDED

Additional research is needed on cultural norms and expectations concerning the perception, determinants, and impacts of elder mistreatment and psychological well-being in Chinese elders.⁴



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Mistreatment of Korean Elders

This research brief synthesizes the latest available information and research relating to the mistreatment of Korean older adults living in the United States, providing insight into general cultural beliefs, views, norms, of Korean immigrant communities and how they relate to and influence elder mistreatment.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Filial piety, family harmony, and patriarchal values** profoundly shape the response to elder mistreatment in the Korean community.
- Definitions of **psychological abuse** and **financial exploitation** among Korean elders are unique compared to other populations
- Immigration and acculturation experiences shape an older Korean's experience of elder mistreatment.
- Korean elders are **less likely to seek outside help or disclose family problems.**
- Promising intervention strategies include providing educational information on financial abuse, improving communication between elders and adult children, involving indigenous healthcare providers and religious leaders in elder abuse education, and increasing help-seeking behaviors.

Background and Statistics

In 2018, there were an estimated **1.9 million** individuals of Korean descent in the United States.¹

Older Korean immigrants likely have limited knowledge and perception of elder abuse.² Reporting of elder abuse among this community is very low.^{2,3}



Perceptions of Elder Mistreatment

FILIAL PIETY AND OTHER CORE CULTURAL VALUES

Filial piety, a core cultural value emphasized by Korean elders, indicates adult children's obligation to provide caregiving, support, and respect to their aging parents.³

Core values of traditional culture, such as collectivism and family harmony, filial piety, marital and gender roles, spirituality, and social characteristics profoundly shape the norms and expectations regarding interpersonal and/or social interactions related to and in response to elder mistreatment within the Korean community.^{2,4} Korean community members in one study expressed that family members should **emphasize family harmony over individual rights.**⁵

Patriarchal values also have an influential role. In one study, Korean participants highlighted how beliefs in male dominance and traditional patriarchal values culturally condoned spousal abuse.⁵

One study discovered **substantial differences between subjective perceptions of abuse and actual experiences of abuse.**²



EMOTIONAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

Studies have demonstrated that older Koreans are likely to be sensitive to psychological abuse.⁶ Korean participants in one study agreed that being disrespected and ignored by their adult children were the worst forms of psychological abuse.⁴ A unique form of psychological abuse revealed in this study was the “**silent treatment**”, which was commonly perceived as an extreme form of psychological humiliation.⁴

Participants also identified the following forms of psychological abuse⁴:



Passing elderly parents from one child to another to avoid caregiving responsibility



Spreading gossip and rumors to blackmail an elderly person to inflict mental anguish



Male spouse's psychological domination and control of his female partner



FAMILY EXPECTATIONS AND FINANCIAL ABUSE

Cultural Definitions of Financial Abuse

One study found that many elderly Koreans defined financial abuse based on filial piety.⁴ The most frequently reported definition was “**not providing financial support to elderly parents.**”⁴ Other descriptions among Korean elders were:

- “social welfare benefit-related financial abuse”⁷
- “choosing not to repay borrowed funds”⁷
- “immigration-related financial abuse”⁴

Vulnerability to Financial Exploitation

Cultural norms of collectivism and family harmony might contribute to Korean elders' vulnerability to exploitation.

Korean older adult participants in one study reported a tendency to support their adult children financially even after they have married and moved away.⁵ Participants also commonly reported the unauthorized use of their income or savings by their adult children and the unauthorized transfers of legal titles.⁵ Another study found that many immigrant Korean elders relied on their children for things like managing bank accounts, using ATM cards, or receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security benefits.⁴ Such dependence might aggravate the elders' vulnerability to exploitation. Although all participants of this study considered the unauthorized use of an elderly person's money by a non-family member to be exploitive, **elderly victims were less likely to report financial exploitation committed by a family member.**⁴



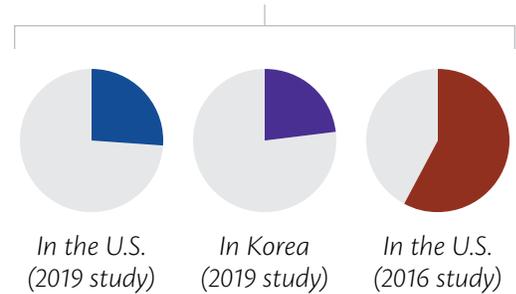
IMMIGRATION-RELATED ABUSE AND SEXUAL ABUSE

Korean participants in one study revealed that immigrant elders confronted additional forms of psychological, financial, and sexual abuse.⁴ Additionally, Korean experts commented that identifying elder sexual abuse is especially challenging since it is a culturally taboo subject.⁴

Prevalence

One study found the prevalence of elder mistreatment to be comparable among older Korean immigrants in the U.S. and older Koreans in Korea. Out of 240 Korean elders living **in the U.S., roughly one fourth (26.3%) experienced elder abuse**. Out of 240 older Koreans **in Korea, 23.3% had experienced elder abuse**.³ Another study found that out of 200 Korean elders in the U.S., **over half (58%) experienced one or more types of elder abuse**.²

Korean elders experienced elder abuse



Forms of Abuse Reported

Emotional abuse was the most frequently reported among Korean elders.^{2,3} Below are findings from two different studies on the forms of abuse reported.^{2,3}

Form of Abuse	Study 1: Chang, 2019 (n=240)	Study 2: Chang, 2016 (n=200)
Emotional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 50.4% given the “silent treatment” 40% experienced “name calling” 37% were “insulted, threatened, intimidated, and humiliated” 31.3% were “isolated from regular activities” 13% were “isolated from family and relatives” 12% were “treated like an Infant” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 37.5% reported being given the silent treatment 28.5% reported name calling 28.0% reported insults, threats, intimidation, and humiliation
Neglect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 30% reported a “lack of in-home service provider” 22% reported “refusal to pay for necessary care services” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12.5% reported a lack of in-home services (e.g., housekeeping)
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10.4% reported “check cashed without consent” 5% reported that someone had “forged signatures forged” 5% reported “improper effort to have a guardian” 2.5% reported “stolen money or property” 1% reported “coerced or deceived into signing any legal documents” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14.0% reported having money or possessions stolen
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 29.2% experienced “hitting, beating, pushing, shaking, slapping, and kicking” 17.5% reported “inappropriate use of drugs” 7% experienced “physical restraints” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10% reported being hit, beaten, pushed, shoved, and shaken
Sexual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2% reported “unwanted touch” 1% reported “nonconsensual sexual contact.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.5% indicated unwanted touching.

Perpetrators

One study reported that **about half of Korean participants that reported abuse identified the perpetrator as a spouse.**³ In another study, the most frequently identified perpetrators were the son (21.5%) and spouse (20.5%).²

RISK FACTORS



Education Level

Out of 200 participants in one study, 81.1% of those who had middle school or lower level education had experienced elder abuse.²



Health Status

One study found that the odds of elder abuse were 97% lower for Korean elders with fair/good health status versus very poor health status.³



Older Age

In one study, older Koreans (75-79 years) were found to be at higher risk of elder abuse than younger Korean elders (60-74 years).³

Help-Seeking Behavior

Older Korean immigrants tend to prefer using informal resources for help, such as family members and relatives. One study found that **almost half of the respondents indicated that if an older adult is abused by a family member, individuals outside the family should not intervene.** Only half of the respondents knew about formal agencies that could help if they were abused.² Participants in another study stated that expressing needs for support or complaining about adversity were seen as a weakness and source of disharmony. Participants expressed that elder mistreatment was **especially challenging to report when the perpetrator was their own child.**⁴ In another study, Korean participants expressed strong agreement about **exclusive family ties and beliefs in the prohibition of disclosure about family issues.**⁵



Tips for Working With Korean Elders and Advancing Research



Be Sensitive to Different Cultural Definitions of Elder Mistreatment

When assessing elder mistreatment, particularly financial abuse, practitioners should be aware of how culture shapes definitions of abuse.^{2,7}



Consider the Impact of Governmental Aid

Service providers working with immigrant populations from countries where no governmental financial aid is available should consider this unique dynamic. The U.S. government's financial assistance for elders can lead to family behaviors experienced as financial abuse by Korean elders.⁷



Intervention Recommendations

The following intervention strategies have been recommended for protecting Korean elders:

- Provide education about cultural definitions for financial abuse to help adult children engage in healthy financial relationships with their parents.⁷
- Create educational programs to enhance elderly Korean immigrants' financial literacy.⁷
- Provide services entailing improved communication, understanding, and relationship building between aging parents in Korean communities and their adult children's families.⁴
- Focus on increasing help-seeking behaviors through the alleviation of negative consequences, reduction of stigma, and promoting education on reporting and advocacy.⁴
- Reach out to indigenous health-care professionals and religious leaders and provide them with information about what constitutes elder abuse and how to help victims.^{2,3}
- Adult Protective Services (APS) agencies and community-based organizations could develop outreach programs targeting undereducated, older Korean immigrants in urban areas and provide programs to increase awareness, enhance prevention, and help victims cope.²

RESEARCH NEEDED

Additional research is needed on the **immigrant-related social context**, particularly in the area of how elders' traditional expectations of their children's financial support become diluted over time, as they receive governmental financial benefits and experience acculturation.²



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